10. Political Theory

GANDHI said of himself : "I am not a man who sits down and thinks out problems syllogistically.* I am a man of action. I react to a situation intuitively. Logic comes afterwards, it does not precede the event."[1] As is well known, he was a "political actionist and a practical philosopher ; he was not a theorist."[2] To quote Prof. Nirmal Kumar Bose : "in the traditional language of ancient India, he is a *Kṣatriya*, not a *Brāhmaṇa*. But his greatness lies in the fact that he has accepted and advocated the law of love as the supreme law of our being and has lived his life accordingly ; he can be regarded as a warrior-*Brāhmaṇa*, but he cannot be said to be a sage-philosopher *Brāhmaṇa*."[3] How mistaken was Montagu's judgement about Gandhi : "He lives practically on air and is a pure visionary" ![4]

Gandhi did not set himself to the task of a systematic presentation of his views about the nature of political activity. The construction of a system of political philosophy did never interest or bother him. His ideas were thrown off as comments on given, concrete realities and were intended to give a new shape to events and for the remaking of man as a moral person. It was in the nature of the circumstances that Gandhi did not, nor could he possibly, evolve a definite and clear-cut political theory. For him "theory is all grey—evergreen is life" (Goethe). The place of theory was subordinate to that of organic unity, i.e., life. It would be an unrewarding task to look for a consistent, systematized body of thought in Gandhi's

* "In dealing with living entities, the dry syllogistic method leads not only to bad logic bnt sometimes to fatal logic."—*Harijan*, 14.8.37, p. 212.

writings for he owed absolute allegiance to none of the prevailing schools—anarchist, Marxist, liberal democratic, etc. And construction of any rigid, fixed 'ism' was alien to his nature—such a continually evolving personality he was. One may, on close examination of Gandhi's writings, come to the conclusion that his political philosophy is indeed elusive.[5] But that does not make any the less significant the basic core of his thought. As has been pointed out by Dr. Bondurant, the contribution of Gandhian political theory "has been not alone to the development of a social and political method. It extends further into the realm of political thought and challenges the substantial presuppositions of the mainstream of political theory."[6] It is in this challenge to the current political theories that its significance lies. The study of Gandhi's political theory is relevant from that point of view.

Methodology

From the standpoint of methodology, Gandhi's approach was deductive, empirical and pragmatic. He deduced certain conclusions from his basic assumptions—metaphysical and ethical. Metaphysics, Ethics, Economics, Sociology and Politics were intertwined. He was for, in Toynbee's[7] language, 'etherialization', that is, spiritualization, of politics. Spiritualizing meant for Gandhi moralizing, as we have seen elsewhere (p. 116 *supra*). But he was no moral fadist. Any student of Gandhi's political thought and his eventful life will readily see for himself that he developed a keen empirical outlook towards life in general and political and social events in particular. He observed, experienced and suggested the way out. His plea for the removal of untouchability, his crusading mission for communal amity, his solutions for the economic regeneration of poverty-stricken India, bear testimony to his rich experience of life based upon empirical investigation. As was his wont he looked at things empirically and pragmatically. This note of pragmatism is evident in his political thought. But so, who can help without being a pragmatist in this pragmatic world ? And pragmatic approach necessarily

leads one to eclecticism. He was eclectic enough to draw from different sources and schools what fitted in with his basic outlook of truth and non-violence. The 'eclectic alchemy' of Gandhi's political philosophy evolved an amalgam out of heteregenous founts of his fundamental faith and inspiration.

His approach to politics was indeed moral. And that lends a special significance to his theory in this age of amoral politics. It is true that he did not care much for the historical and quantitative methods of politics as has been noted Dr. V. P. Varma,[8] but the deficiences that follow therefrom have been more than compensated in the form of giving a moral direction to politics. This moral orientation is evident in his analysis of the concepts of political theory, viz. State, democracy, freedom, rights, etc. It is from a normative or valuational standpoint —norms or values as he understood and accepted to be fundamental—that he elaborated his concepts of political theory.

One may tend to infer that in such an approach of Gandhi's there is more of ethics than of politics. Dr. Benoy Sarkar rebutted this point of view. To quote him : "Such a criticism can come only from those who by politics understand solely or chiefly the constitution-making, programme-planning or party-bossing. But in this kind of ethics of politics Gandhi is in very good company with Fichte, as author of the *Reden an die Deutsche Nation*, and Śukrācārya as author of the *Nītisāra*, nay, with Plato, as author of the *Republic*."[9]

Philosophy of State

The methodological standpoint being thus delineated, we shall proceed to make a brief outline-survey of his philosophy of state. Some preliminary remarks are deemed necessary before we engage ourselves in that task. Since he was not committed to any exclusive school of political thought, and since his writings had been responses to particular situations, though within a basic conceptual framework, it is indeed a problem to categorize his thought. His concern was more in the substance of things than in attributing labels to what he thought and for the realization of which he worked. For a western student

of Gandhian political theory it is rather difficult to comprehend the indigenous terms like *Rāma Rāj*, etc., which he used on different occasions in defining his political ideal. But Gandhi was no traditionalist to cling to the age-old meanings of those terms. It was quite characteristic of him to add new meanings to them, so that in quality they became quite different from what they popularly stood for.* As has been noted by Prof Nirmal Kumar Bose : "Perhaps this was one of the mechanisms by means of which Gandhi kept himself rooted in the past, and yet tried to carry India forward in directions radically different from ancient tradition."[10] The French historian and sociologist, Prof. Louis Massignon, has aptly remarked : "He was a genius in investing common words with unique meanings."[11] Hence, one must try to understand terms employed by him in the sense he did so and in the connotation he attributed to those terms. One faces another difficulty in a theoretical analysis of his concept of state. Gandhi being "built of tremendous opposites"[12]—a unique combination of a prophet and a politician of genius—sometimes spoke and wrote in terms of the ultimate ideal and sometimes in terms of the immediately realizable objective. And there emerged two Gandhis —one philosophical and the other practical politician eager to come to grip with the realities, with a keen sense of the objective. The citizen-leader Gandhi moved with the times and his theory underwent a continuous process of evolution. This evolution, as we have noted previously, is a distinctive note of the Gandhian theory. Gandhi would have been marked as a political leader of least significance if he could not have moved with the times and reflected the historical urges and aspirations of the Indian masses. There was, indeed, a gap between the ideal political order he envisaged and the national democratic state for the creation of which he led the Indian nation. This hiatus between the ideal and the actual was not of his making ; in was implicit in the given objective situation in Gandhi's India. This was not a case of political opportunism as

* "I use old words giving them a new meaning."—M. K. Gandhi. See 'Source of My Sympathy' in *Harijan*, 16. 9. 39.

has been sometimes alleged, but a clear expression of astute realism which speaks of his sagacity and political maturity.

We have discussed in Chapter 2 the background of Gandhi's political philosophy, and as such it is no use referring to the socio-historical roots and the sources of intellectual influence which shaped his political thought to a very great extent. But it would be worthwhile to refer to some of these, as briefly as possible, as that would help us in having a correct perspective of Gandhi's political theory.

First, *Dharma* is the basic concept of Hindu political thought, broad in its implications and open to several definitions.[13] Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan has defined *dharma* as the complex of influences which shape the moral feeling and the character of the people and serve as a code of conduct, supported by the general conscience of the people. It is not a fixed code of mechanical rules, but a living spirit which grows and moves in response to the development of society.[14] Two major meanings of *dharma* are that it is a source of political, social and religious duties which is capable of changing them ; and that it is an agency of absolute truth executing these duties in the world of men.[15] As has been rightly observed by Dr. Paul F. Power,[16] Gandhi made use of both the meanings, but generally tended to understand *dharma* as a universal morality to which the affairs of men and states should correspond, much as the first view suggests. Gandhi, while not accepting the orthodox versions of *dharma* on many vital matters, adhered to the broad traditions of Hindu thought.*

Secondly, his concept of universal morality transcended the Hindu concept in the sense that he assimilated the Christian

* Dr. Joan V. Bondurant observes : "There is a strain in Hindu political thought which is idealist in form and conservative in effect. The concept of *dharma* which lies at the heart of ancient Hindu polity is reminiscent of aspects of the Hegelian metaphysical theory...(which) endeavours to exhibit the state as the embodiment of greatness and glory and an expression of the Spirit or the Absolute. The Hindu metaphysical concept of *dharma* could lend itself to a similar development. But the Gandhian approach could scarcely be reconciled with such an interpretation ...The Gandhian position is basically in agreement with critics of the metaphysical theory."—*Conquest of Violence*, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1959, p. 165.

ethic, and his concept of fundamental morality was a synthesis of the best of the Hindu and Christian traditions.

Thirdly, he was considerably influenced by modern political traditions. As has been noted by Prof. Humayun Kabir, he was an inheritor of the liberal tradition, of the tradition of philosophical anarchism and of the tradition of the collectivization found in the socialist thought.[17]

Fourthly, elemental humanism is the essence of Gandhi's attitude to the state.

Fiftbly, the role that he had to play as the supreme commander of the nation engaged in fight ·with the mightiest state organization of the world determined his attitude to a large extent, towards the state power-structure.

Keeping this background in view let us proceed to discuss the Gandhian concept of state. This section should be read along with the section on Gandhi's concept of freedom which would enable us to form a clearer picture of the state he envisaged.

State as the organ of violence

Gandhi held that violence was evil. Violence includes not only physical coercion but also economic and social coercion. Power of physical coercion belongs to the state. In the modern absolute state there is no limit to the extent of this power. This power of the state to coerce is, according to Gandhi, a kind of organized violence in which lies the essence of the modern state. To quote Gandhi :

"I look upon an increase in the power of the State with the greatest fear, because, although while apparently doing good by minimizing exploitation, it does the greatest harm to mankind by destroying individuality which lies at the root of all progress.

"The State represents violence in a concentrated and organized form. The individual has a soul, but as the State is a soulless machine, it can never be weaned from violence to which it owes its very existence.

"What I disapprove of is an organization based on force which a State is."[18]

Gandhi's characterization of the State as the organ of 'violence in a concentrated and organized form' indicates how repelled he was at the omnipotence and the coercive character of the state. As one who believed in the sanctity of the individual and for whom non-violence was a fundamental creed it was but natural that he would characterize the state in such a term. But creed or subjective faith apart, he drew enough lessons from the world he faced—a world where imperialist domination, economic exploitation and racial discrimination were inseparably tied up with political authority.

Objectively considered, the following events and factors might have influenced Gandhi to develop such an attitude towards the state.

1. His direct experience of the Zulu 'rebellion' (1906). Gandhi's *Autobiography* records that at that time he considered himself a citizen of Natal and he then believed that the British Empire existed for the welfare of the world. A genuine sense of loyalty prevented him from even wishing ill to the Empire. The rightness or otherwise of the 'rebellion' was, under the circumstances, not likely to affect his decision. So he made an offer to the Government to raise a Stretcher-bearer Corps for service with the troops. The offer was accepted. The scene on the battlefront was indeed ghastly and revolting for such a sensitive soul as his. To quote Gandhi : "The Zulu 'rebellion' was full of new experiences and gave me much food for thought. The Boer war had not brought home to me the horrors of war with anything like the vividness that the 'rebellion' did. *This was no war but a man-hunt.*"[19] (emphasis added).

2. General Smuts' 'breach of faith' during the Satyāgraha movement (1907-8) for the repeal of the Asiatic Registration Act shocked him badly. The 'foul play' of this 'heartless man' might have been instrumental in making a deep impact on his thought process.

3. the vulgarity and monstrosity of British domination and the sub-human existence of the people of this country had struck him to the roots of his being and there emerged a rebel who

organized and mobilized the non-violent strength of the nation against the 'leonine violence' of the political power represented by the British government.

His encounter with the racialists in South Africa and the British imperialists in India could only lead him to see the essentially violent character of the state.

On Political Sovereignty

The premise of the theory of absolute sovereignty of the state is that the laws of the state are the highest arbiters of the conduct of the citizen irrespective of the conformity of the laws to the general interests of the community. Obligation of the citizen to the state, according to this theory, is unlimited and unconditional. Gandhi resisted political sovereignty understood as absolute, non-responsible power. The validity of the absolutist theory of sovereignty has been questioned from different premises by pluralists, anarchists, and Catholic humanists like Jacques Maritain.[20] As we are not concerned here with the grounds of political obligation but with the limits of it, it may be pertinent to note that in recent political thought the question of political obligation has become secondary. There is a wider and higher obligation and when that higher obligation comes into conflict with political obligation, resistance to the state becomes just and moral. Both Hindu and Western political theories give sanctions for such resistance. To many of these thinkers the problem of political obligation is essentially moral. The English liberal thinker, T. H. Green, said: "The general principle that the citizen must never act otherwise than as a citizen does not carry with it an obligation under all conditions to conform to the law of his State, since those laws may be inconsistent with the true end of the State as the sustainer and harmonizer of social relations."[21] For Gandhi, as for Green, the relevance and the justification of politics is an expression of the moral life. The state is to be judged by the qualities of its citizens whose moral development it can help or hinder. It may be said

that for both Green and Gandhi the two crucial questions of politics are those of obedience to law and the employment of force.[22]

"Our first duty", Laski wrote, "is to be true to our conscience."[23] For Gandhi "disobedience to the law of the State becomes a peremptory duty when it comes in conflict with the law of God."[24] As early as 1909 he wrote in *Hind Swaraj* : "It is contrary to our manhood, if we obey laws contrary to our conscience.... So long as the superstition that man should obey unjust laws exists so long will their slavery exist."[25] And later in 1921 : "Submission...to a state wholly or largely unjust is an immortal barter for liberty. A citizen who thus realizes the evil nature of a state is not satisfied to live on its sufferance, and therefore appears to the others who do not share his belief to be a nuisance to society, whilst, he is endeavouring to compel the state without committing a moral breach to arrest him. Thus considered, civil resistance is a most powerful expression of a soul's anguish and an eloquent protest against the continuance of an evil state."[26]

To Gandhi "political power is not an end in itself but one of the means of enabling people to better their conditions in every department of life."[27] This attitude to the state stands counterposed to the Hegelian metaphysical theory which endeavours to exhibit the state as the embodiment of greatness and glory and an expression of the Spirit or the Absolute.*

Glorification of the sovereignty of the state was, according to Gandhi, a challenge to the moral right of man to shape his own destiny. Even the moderate version of parliamentary sovereignty would make little impression on his mind. He believed in the "sovereignty of the people based on pure moral authority."[28] But this should not be taken to mean that the 'moral authority' should take the place of state

* L. T. Hobhouse, the English Liberal thinker, in *The Metaphysical Theory of The State : A Criticism* (p. 43) summed up the Hegelian metaphysical theory in the following terms : "The individual attains his true self and freedom in conformity to his real will. This real will is the general will and the general will is embodied in the state."

sovereignty. In our discussion on the Gandhian theory of trusteeship we have noted that he did have a decided preference for self-reliance and voluntarism. But the theory of trusteeship does not exclude legislative regulation of the ownership and use of wealth. He would even go to the extent of dispossessing the rich through the instrument of state with the minimum exercise of violence.[29] He would prefer trusteeship, but if it was unavoidable he would support a minimum of state ownership.[30] This leads us to the question of compatibility or otherwise of anarchism with sovereignty which will be discussed in connexion with the Gandhian ideal of state.

Gandhi made the essential distinction between State and Society. In modern political theory this distinction has been taken note of. Prof. Ernest Barker in his celebrated book *Principles of Social and Political Theory* has drawn the distinction between State and Society, and further between *within the State* and *in terms of the State* and *the area of Society* and *the activity of social thought*. Political obligation is due within the state, and in terms of the state it may be granted that it is unconditional. But there is a sphere of activity in man's life, which transcends sometimes even the well-known sphere of the political state and enters the wide arena of society. Here political obligation is to be qualified and becomes conditional.[31] Barker observes that the area of society is voluntary co-operation, its energy is goodwill and its method is elasticity ; while the area of the state is mechanical action, its energy is force and its method is rigidity. He says : "...a new and a super-political obligation enters as soon as we take into our view the socially created and socially developed idea of justice ; an obligation which we may call 'social'."[32] Barker considers the social obligation to be higher. One may recall here the position of Rabindranath who enunciated the philosophy of indifferentism to the state in *Svadeśī Samāj* (1904).

The above discussion shows that Gandhi was opposed to the absolute sovereignty of the state as propounded by Hobbes, Austin and Hegel. He might not have come across any of the

writings of these theorists, but that is of no consequence. What is relevant is that he could very well hit at the core of the problem of sovereignty—a concept that has raised many conflicting issues yet to be resolved. His objection to the state sovereignty may be presumed to be based on the following grounds :

First, his metaphysical belief in the primacy of spiritual authority over temporal authority.

Secondly, his faith in the inner moral conscience of the individual as superior to the organized might of the state.

Thirdly, his belief in the sovereignty of the people based on moral authority as against the organized power system of the legal sovereign.

Political Ideal

"If the individual ceases to count", Gandhi asked, "what is left of society ?"[33] Gandhi regarded the individual as the centre of authority and value. He was categorical in his estimate of the relation between the individual and the state. To quote him : "Ultimately it is the individual which is the unit."[34] He held that the state and government derive their existence and power from the individuals. This concept of the ultimate authority of the individual logically paved the way for the enunciation of the theory of non-violent non-co-operation with the state and the exploitative system that stand in the way of the all-round evolution of the individual, because for Gandhi "*The individual is the one supreme consideration.*"[35] (italics ours) This emphasis on the moral authority of the individual is the key note of Gandhian philosophy. His anguish and indignation expressed in the pages of *Hind Swaraj* against modern civilization—including modern power system—was based on this fundamental belief. And he insisted on this fundamental belief till his last day.

In 1916, on the occasion of the opening of the Benares Hindu University, Gandhi called himself an anarchist,* but of another

* 'Whoever denies authority and fights against it is an anarchist', said Sébastien Faure. So few doctrines or movements have been so

type[86] (the reference was to the violent revolutionaries or terrorists, as they were generally called). One may not be sure that the distinction that he made between the two types of anarchism was a result of his acquaintance with the prevalent literature of anarchist political philosophy. But as is generally known, he was influenced by Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God is Within You* to a very considerable extent while he was engaged in his experiments of satyāgraha in South Africa. Stefan

confusedly understood in the public mind, and so few have presented in their own variety of approach and action so much excuse for confusion, that a definition of anarchism seems to be of prime importance.

George Woodcock writes on this point: "Faure's statement at least marks out the area in which anarchism exists. All anarchists deny authority; many of them fight against it. But by no means all who deny authority and fight against it can reasonably be called anarchists. Historically, anarchism is a doctrine which poses a criticism of existing society; a view of a desirable future society; and a means of passing from one to the other. Mere unthinking revolt does not make an anarchist, nor does a philosophical or religious rejection of earthly power. Mystics and Stoics seek not anarchy, but another kingdom. Anarchism, historically speaking, is concerned mainly with man in his relation to society. Its ultimate aim is always social change; its present attitude is always one of social condemnation, even though it may proceed from an individualist view of man's nature: its method is always that of social rebellion, violent or otherwise.

"But even among those who recognize anarchism as a social-political doctrine, confusion still exists. Anarchism, nihilism, and terrorism are often mistakenly equated...The stereotype of the anarchist is that of the cold-blooded assassin who attacks with dagger or bomb the symbolic pillars of established society. Anarchy, in popular parlance, is malign chaos.

"Yet malign chaos is clearly very far from the intent of men like Tolstoy and Godwin, Thoreau and Kropotkin, whose social theories have all been described as anarchists. There is an obvious discrepancy between the stereotype anarchist and the anarchist as we most often see him in reality; that division is due partly to semantic confusions and partly to historical misunderstanding.

"In the derivation of the words 'anarchy', 'anarchism', and 'anarchist', as well as in the history of their use, we find justifications for both the conflicting sets of meanings given to them. *Anarchos*, the original Greek word, means merely 'without a ruler' and thus anarchy itself can clearly be used in a general context to mean either the negative condition of unruliness or the positive condition of being unruled because rule is unnecessary for the preservation of order."—*Anarchism*, Penguin Books, 1963, pp. 7-8.

Envico Malatesta's comments on the terms anarchy and anarchism are as follows: "Before such an organization (viz. the anarchist society) had begun to be considered possible and desirable by a whole class of thinkers the word anarchy was taken universally in the sense of disorder and it is still adopted in that sense by the ignorant and by adversaries interested in distorting the truth."—*Anarchy*, Freedom Press, London, 1949, p. 1.

Zweig described Tolstoy as 'the boldest heretic' and 'revolutionary anarchist'.[37] Tolstoy did not call himself an anarchist, because he applied the names to those who wished to change society by violent means ; he preferred to think of himself as a literal Christian. Nevertheless, he was not entirely unpleased when, in 1900, the German scholar Paul Eltzbacher wrote a pioneer survey of the various trends of anarchist thought and included Tolstoy's ideas among them, demonstrating that, while he repudiated violence, his basic doctrine—and particularly his categorical rejection of the state and of property—fitted clearly into the general anarchist position.[38] Gandhi, it may be noted here, did not regard Tolstoy as a philosophical anarchist.[39] Digression apart, Tolstoy's anti-authority—anti-state-and-church—philosophy influenced Gandhi in choosing and formulating his political ideal.

One may guess that Kropotkin also had influenced Gandhi's political thought, though no authentic evidence in support of this is at hand.* D. G. Tendulkar, the biographer of *Mahatma*, records : "Gandhi's three years' stay in England [1888-1891] was eventful. These were the years of great intellectual activity and unhindered freedom of thought and speech. The country as a whole had become a living university...Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid* was appearing serially in the *Nineteenth Century* and Kropotkin himself was propagating his ideas in England."[40] It seems likely that Gandhi's young mind was exposed to the anarchist philosophy preached by Kropotkin.

Sources of influence apart, Gandhi, when he described himself as an anarchist, did not mean it, it may be presumed, in the sense of unruliness (negative condition) but in the positive sense of being unruled because rule is unnecessary for the preservation of order.

* George Woodcock observes : "he [Gandhi] was encouraged in his idea of village communes by an assiduous reading of Kropotkin."—op. cit., p. 218. But he has not substantiated this statement with any evidence.

Horace Alexander writes : "Although I have no direct evidence that Gandhiji has been influenced by the writings of Kropotkin, I should not at all be surprised to learn that he has been. On the other hand, it may simply be that his experience and his own thought have led him to similar conclusions."—*Social and Political Ideas of Mahatma Gandhi*, Indian Council of World Affairs, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1949, p. 10.

As has been observed earlier, there were two Gandhis—the idealist and the realist. In his role as the foremost leader of the national liberation movement the realist in him was sufficiently awake to the objective reality and he pressed forward for the establishment of a democratic political order. In our discussion on the evolution of his economic thought we have seen that in 1924 he told an interviewer that he wanted the unavoidable heavy machinery to be either owned or controlled by the state.[41] But it would be a mistake to infer that he shifted his loyalty, in so far as his ultimate philosophical standpoint was concerned, from the anarchist ideal to the socialist programme of state-ownership.

Speaking of his own ultimate political ideal he wrote in 1931 : "If national life become so perfect as to become self-regulated, no representation becomes necessary. There is then a state of enlightened anarchy. In such a state every one is his own ruler. He rules himself in such a manner that he is never a hindrance to his neighbour. In the ideal state, therefore, there is no political power because there is no State. But the ideal is never fully realized in life. Hence the classical statement of Thoreau that that Government is best which governs the least."[42]

Mahadev Desai reported a conversation on the same subject in *Harijan* (21.7.40, p. 211) :

But are we not being driven to philosophical anarchism ? Is that not an impossible ideal ? These questions were asked by a philosophical friend.

'Does anyone know true non-violence ?' he asked.

Gandhiji immediately replied : "Nobody knows it, for nobody can practise perfect non-violence."

'Then how can it be used in politics ?'

"It can be used in politics precisely as it can be used in the domestic sphere. We may not be perfect in our use of it, but we definitely discard the use of violence, and grow from failure to success."

'You would govern non-violently. But all legislation is violence.'

"No, not all legislation. Legislation imposed by people upon themselves is non-violence to the extent it is possible in society. A society organized and run on the basis of complete non-violence would be purest anarchy."

'Do you think that non-violence or democracy that you visualize was ever realized in the olden times ?'

"I do not know. But if it was not, it only means that we had never made the attempt to realize the highest in us. I had no doubt in my mind that at some stage we were wiser and that we have to grow wiser than we are today in order to find what beauties are hidden in human nature. Perfect non-violence is impossible so long as we exist physically, for we would want some space at least to occupy. Perfect non-violence whilst you are inhabiting the body is only a theory like Euclid's point or straight line, but we have to endeavour every moment of our lives."

In the same year during a conversation at Santiniketan, in answer to the question 'can a State carry on strictly according to the principle of non-violence ?' Gandhi replied, "A government cannot succeed in becoming entirely non-violent, because it represents all the people. I do not today conceive of such a golden age. But I do believe in the possibility of a predominantly non-violent society. And I am working for it."[43]

In 1946, he wrote : "There remains the question as to whether in an ideal society, there should be any or no government. I do not think, we need worry ourselves about this at this moment. If we continue to work for such a society, it will slowly come into being to an extent, such that the people can benefit by it. Euclid's line is one without breadth but no one has so far been able to draw it and never will. All the same it is only by keeping the ideal line in mind that we have made progress in geometry. What is true here is true of every ideal."[44]

We have seen above that Gandhi's ultimate political ideal was stateless democracy. The stateless society of self-regulating harmony is ideal in the Platonic sense that

it is a model to strive for, not a goal that can be attained. But as the 'golden age' was far off he thought it practicable to work for the realization of a 'predominantly non-violent society'. This attitude towards the ultimate ideal, in the sphere of politics in this context, fits in quite squarely with his general philosophical attitude. We have seen in our discussion on Gandhi's concept of human nature that he believed not in the perfection but in the perfectibility of man (see pp. 110-1 *supra*). "Let us be sure of our ideal. We shall ever fail to realize it, but should never cease to strive for it."[45] Dr. G. N. Dhawan interpreted this 'unbridgeable gulf' between the ultimate ideal and realizable goal in the following terms : "The ideal non-violent society of Gandhiji, unattainable due to human imperfection, indicates the direction rather than the destination, the process rather than the consummation. The structure of the state that will emerge as a result of a non-violent revolution will be a compromise, a *via media*, between the ideal non-violent society and the facts of human nature. It will be the attainable 'middle way'* of Gandhiji, the first step after the revolution, towards the ideal."[46]

The ultimate ideal of 'purest anarchy' or stateless society being unrealizable, Gandhi's thought was moving in the 'direction' of the evolution of a predominantly non-violent state. The word 'non-violent State' was used by Gandhi himself in *Harijan* (25. 8. 40), where he wrote, "the ideal non-violent state will be an ordered anarchy." A non-violent State is a contradiction in terms because the state "represents violence in a concentrated and organized form." Dr. Dhawan elaborated the concept of non-violent or satyāgrahī state. In an explanatory footnote he explained 'non-violent State' in the following terms : "By a non-violent State we mean the State that is predominantly non-violent. A State depending as it

* Gandhi once said : "Having ascertained the law of our being, we must set about reducing it to practice to the extent of our capacity and no further. That is the middle way."—Quoted in Gopinath Dhawan, *The Political Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1951, p. 328 n.

does more or less on coercion is the negation of non-violence. The completely non-violent State would no longer be a State. It would then be the Stateless society and society can be Stateless when it is completely or almost completely non-violent. This is an ideal that may not be fully realized. What we may get in actual practice may be a predominantly non-violent State advancing towards, though perhaps never reaching, the Stateless stage."[47] One may object to the employment of such contradictory terms in defining an ideal from the semantic point of view. But the essence of the term is explicit and, as we have observed earlier, Gandhi was not much interested in giving names to things; rather he was more concerned with the substance of things. It is from that point of view that the term "the ideal non-violent State" is to be understood. (For a systematic discussion of the socio-economic structure and functions of the non-violent state one may refer to Dhawan's dissertation, Chapter 11)

Gandhi's occasional reference to 'enlightened anarchy' has, like his ultimate political ideal, given rise to varying interpretations. Some interpreters call him a 'philosophical anarchist', while others hold the view that though some of the elements of Gandhian political thought bear resemblance to those of some of the anarchist thinkers he cannot be categorized as an anarchist thinker. In terms of the ultimate ideal of stateless society, anarchists, Marxists and Gandhi would all agree. But differences are still there. Each of these theories carry a distinctive note of its own. A student of Gandhian political theory shall have to find out where Gandhi stood in relation to anarchism and Marxism. It is in the background of an all-round survey of his theories of freedom, democracy, etc., that a fuller treatment of this question can be undertaken and as such we would take it up at the close of our survey.

Concept of Freedom

Abraham Lincoln, in the midst of the Civil War, in a gathering at Baltimore in 1864, spoke of freedom as follows:

"The world has never had a good definition of the word liberty,* and the American people, just now, are much in want of one. We all declare for liberty: but in using the same word we do not all mean the same thing. With some the word liberty may mean for each man to do as he pleases with himself and the product of his labor; while with others the same word may mean for some men to do as they please with other men and the product of other men's labour. Here are two, not only different, but incompatible things called by the same name, liberty. And it follows that each of the things is, by the respective parties, called by two different and incompatible names—liberty and tyranny.

"The shepherd drives the wolf from the sheep's throat, for which the sheep thanks the shepherd as his liberator, while the wolf denounces him for the same act, as the destroyer of liberty, especially as the sheep was a black one. Plainly, the sheep and the wolf are not agreed upon a definition of the word liberty; and precisely the same difference prevails today among us human creatures, even in the North, and professing to love liberty. Hence we behold the process by which thousands are daily passing from under the yoke of bondage hailed by some as the advance of liberty and bewailed by others as the destruction of all liberty. Recently, it seems, the people.....have been doing something to define liberty, and thanks to them that, in what they have done, the wolf's dictionary has been repudiated."[48]

In Lincoln's days the problem of liberty or freedom seemed simpler than it is now. Then it was primarily a question of overcoming one specific violation of human freedom, that which

* "In the vocabulary of political thought, the two words 'freedom' and 'liberty' are interchangeable. Although there has been a tendency in the English-speaking world to treat 'liberty' as something 'French, foolish and frivolous', and 'freedom' as 'English, solid and sensible', there is no ground whatever for the distinction. Freedom is, of course, older in Anglo-Saxon tongue, but the two words have been employed in English thought as substantially identical in meaning since the fourteenth century. In their deeper origins, in fact, they possessed strikingly similar characteristics."—Charles A. Beard in *Freedom: Its Meaning*, ed. Ruth Nanda Anshen, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1942, p. 7.

was involved in chattel slavery. Today, as was in Gandhi's days, the problem is tremendously more complicated both in fact and in theory. Our world has other ways than chattel slavery whereby some men can do as they please with other men and the products of their labour. That the term freedom needs constant redefining is both a tribute to its unlimited breadth of meaning and to its ubiquity among us. No word has been dearer to the modern heart or has been more often on modern lips. But what does freedom mean? The term is commonly supposed to be obvious, clear, self-explanatory. There is a sense in which this is true. But as generally used, it requires definition and clarification, and as Lincoln so eloquently showed, it means contradictory things to different persons in modern society based on political subjugation, economic exploitation and racial discrimination. Of all the varied and often contradictory meanings given to the term freedom, the most dominant in our age, the one most invoked and most heralded, is that of freedom as being synonymous with political democracy. Gandhi, with his ear to the ground, close to the toiling masses of India, was able to give a concrete meaning to freedom or Svarāj and we shall see, as we closely pursue Gandhi's concept of freedom, that he repudiated 'the wolf's dictionary'.

Gandhi, it may be noted at the outset, employed the term *Svarāj* in its specific and generic sense, to borrow an expression of Green. While he organized the Indian masses for Svarāj conceived as a constitutional, democratic political order,* he at the same time stressed on its economic, mass, or 'organic' content. Svarāj which first acquired its political meaning

* Lord Ronaldshay & Sir Sankaran Nair accused Gandhi of making an insidious attempt at using the popular movement to put the doctrines of *Hind Swaraj* into effect. He denied the charge: "I am sorry that the Swaraj of the Congress resolution does not mean the Swaraj depicted in the booklet (*Hind Swaraj*). Swaraj according to the Congress means the Swaraj that the people of India want, not what the British Government may condescend to give. So far as I can see, Swaraj will be a Parliament chosen by the people with the fullest power over finance, the police, the military, the navy, the courts and the educational institutions."—*Young India*, 8.12.20 in *Young India*, 1919-22, S. Ganesan, Madras, 1922, pp. 884-5.

(of independence) through its use in that sense by Naoroji* and later through its popularization by Tilak, is closely allied with the meaning of *tapas* as renunciation. Svarāj literally means 'self-rule' and in its original connotation meant autonomy of the moral self (as in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*) where strict control is exercised over the senses. The philosophical meaning of *Svarāj*, as Gandhi conceived it, shall be discussed in a subsequent section. What is relevant to note here is that he seized upon a traditional religious notion and transformed it into a meaningful part of the technique which was to operate not for individual salvation alone, but within the sphere of social polity. Asceticism and sacrifice, which had characterized the efforts of the devotee withdrawn from social contact, were drawn back into the mundane arena and rendered means whereby common social ends might be attained.[49]

Gandhi for the first time enunciated his ideal of Svarāj in *Hind Swaraj* or *Indian Home Rule*. While drawing a comparison between Italy and India, he wrote in 1909 :

"If you believe that because Italians rule Italy the Italian nation is happy, you are groping in darkness. Mazzini has shown conclusively that Italy did not become free. Victor Emanuel gave one meaning to the expression ; Mazzini gave another. According to Emanuel, Cavour and even Garibaldi, Italy meant the king of Italy and his henchmen. According to Mazzini, it meant the whole of the Italian people, that is, its agriculturists. Emanuel was only its servant. The Italy of Mazzini still remains in a state of slavery. At the time of the so-called national war, it was a game of chess between two rival kings with the people of Italy as pawns. The *working classes* in that land are still unhappy. They, therefore, indulge in assassination, rise in revolt, and rebellion on their part is always expected. What substantial gain did Italy obtain after the withdrawal of the Austrian troops ? The gain was only nominal. The reforms for the sake of which

* Gandhi once wrote that Svarāj was "first used in the name of the nation by Dadabhai Naoroji."—D. G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma*, The Publications Division, Govt. of India, 1961, vol. 2, p. 326.

the war was supposed to have been undertaken have not yet been granted. The condition of the people in general still remains the same. I am sure you do not wish to reproduce such a condition in India. I believe that you want the millions of India to be happy, *not that you want the reins of Government in your hands.* If that be so, we have to consider only one thing : *how can the millions obtain self-rule* ? You will admit that people under several Indian princes are being ground down. The latter mercilessly crush them. Their tyranny is greater than that of the English, and if you want such tyranny in India, then we shall never agree. My patriotism does not teach me that I am to allow people to be crushed under the heel of Indian princes just as much as that of the English. *By patriotism I mean the welfare of the whole people*, and if I could secure it at the hands of the English, I should bow down my head to them. If any Englishman dedicated his life to securing the freedom of India, resisting tyranny and serving the land, I should welcome that Englishman as an Indian."[50] (emphases added)

Gandhi's conception of government, as one reviewer has correctly noted, was in harmony with Mazzini's—that is he tested government's every move, every scheme, every law by its effect on the nameless many. "He was not a class fighter in the Marxian sense, yet he came near to the philosophy of proletarianism."[51]

In 1924, he wrote : "Swaraj for me means freedom for the meanest of our countrymen. I am not interested in freeing India merely from the English yoke. I am bent upon freeing India from any yoke whatsoever. I have no desire to exchange 'king log for king stork'."[52]

The mere form of political self-government cannot satisfy the desiderata of any essentially democratic concept of freedom or Svarāj. In 1925, he wrote :

"I, however, feel that fundamentally the disease is the same in Europe as it is in India, inspite of the fact that in the former country the people enjoy political self-governmnt. *No mere transference of political power will satisfy my*

ambition, even though I hold such transference to be a vital necessity of Indian national life. The people of Europe have no doubt political power but no Swaraj. Asian and African races are exploited for their partial benefit, and they, on their part, are being exploited by the ruling class or caste under the sacred name of democracy. At the root, therefore, the disease appears to be the same as in India. The same remedy is, therefore, likely to be applicable. Shorn of all the camouflage, the exploitation of the masses of Europe is sustained by violence.

"Violence on the part of the masses will never remove the disease. Anyway up to now experience shows that success of violence has been shortlived. It has led to greater violence. What has been tried hitherto has been a variety of violence and artificial checks, mainly dependent upon the will of the violent. At the crucial moment these checks have naturally broken down. It seems to me, therefore, that sooner or later, the European masses will have to take to non-violence if they are to find their deliverance. That there is no hope of their taking to it in a body and at once does not baffle me. A few thousands years are but a speck in the vast time circle. Someone has to make a beginning with a faith that will not flinch. I doubt not that the masses, even of Europe, will respond, but what is more emergent in point of time is not so much a large experiment in non-violence as a precise grasp of the meaning of deliverance.

"From what will the masses be delivered ? It will not do to have a vague generalization and to answer from 'exploitation and degradation'. Is not the answer this that they want to occupy the status that capital does today ? If so it can be attained only by violence. But if they want to shun the evils of capital, in other words, if they would revise the viewpoint of capital, they would strive to attain a juster distribution of the products of labour. This immediately takes us to contentment and simplicity, voluntarily adopted. Under the new outlook multiplicity of material wants will not be the aim of life, the aim will be rather their restriction

consistently with comfort. *We shall cease to think of getting what we can but we shall decline to receive what all cannot get.** It occurs to me that it ought not to be difficult to make a successful appeal to the masses of Europe in terms of economics and a fairly successful working of such an experiment must lead to immense and unconscious spiritual results. I do not believe that the spiritual law works in a field of its own. On the contrary, it expresses itself only through the ordinary activities of life. It thus affects the economic, the social and the political fields. If the masses of Europe can be persuaded to adopt the view I have suggested, it will be found that violence will be wholly unnecessary to attain the aim and they can easily come to their own by following the obvious corollaries of non-violence. It may even be that what seems to me to be so natural and feasible for India, may take longer to permeate the inert Indian masses than the active European masses."[53] (emphases added)

As the basic argument in favour of non-violence in relation to the self-rule of the masses or Svarāj has been so clearly and precisely formulated in the passage quoted above that this has been reproduced *in extenso*. One comes across this plea of non-violent Svarāj in many of his writings stretched over a long span of time. (Ref : *Young India*, 1.12.20 in *Young India* 1919-22, G. Natesan, Madras, p. 581 ; *Young India*, 21.5.25, p. 178 ; *Harijan*, 27. 5. 29, p. 143 ; *Constructive Programme*, 1945 edition, p. 7.)

While discussing the more concrete question of political power and its organization, Gandhi wrote in 1925 :

"By Swaraj I mean the government of India by the consent of the people as ascertained by the largest number of the adult population, male or female, native-born or domiciled, who have contributed by *manual labour* to the service of the State and who have taken the trouble of having registered their names as voters...real Swaraj will come not by the acquisition of authority by a few but by the acquisition of

* "Whatever cannot be shared with the masses is taboo to me."—Gandhi, *Harijan*, 2.11.34, p. 301.

the capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused. In other words, Swaraj is to be obtained by educating the masses to a sense of their capacity to regulate and control authority."[54] (emphasis added).

Constructive Programme (1941) conveys the same idea :

"We have long been accustomed to think that power comes only through Legislative Assemblies. I have regarded this belief as a grave error brought about by inertia or hypnotism. A superficial study of British History has made us think that all power percolates to the people from parliaments. The truth is that power resides in the people and it is entrusted for the time being to those whom they may choose as their representatives. Parliaments have no power or even existence independently of the people. It has been my effort for the last twentyone years to convince the people of this simple truth. Civil Disobedience is the storehouse of power. Imagine a whole people unwilling to conform to the laws of the legislature and prepared to suffer the consequences of non-compliance ! They will bring the whole legislative and executive machinery to a standstill. The police and the military are of use to coerce minorities however powerful they may be. But no police or military coercion can bend the resolute will of a people who are out for suffering to the uttermost."[55]

The intervening years between 1920 and 1930 were significant years in the history of the national movement of India. A new wave of radical and socialist ideas made its onrush and there arose a number of independent economic and political organizations during this period. The radicals inside the Congress voiced the demand for a clearer definition of Svarāj. The Indian National Congress passed an important resolution on Fundamental Rights in its Karachi Session (1931).[56]

Prior to the Karachi Congress, Gandhi wrote in *Young India* (1. 5. 30, p. 149) :

"The Swaraj of my...our...dream recognizes no race or religious distinctions. Nor it is to be the monopoly of the

lettered persons nor yet of moneyed men. Swaraj is to be for all, including the farmer, but emphatically including the maimed, the blind, *the starving toiling millions.*" (emphasis added)

Similarly, he wrote on another occasion (*Young India*, 26.3.31, p. 46.) :

"The Swaraj of my dream is the poor man's Swaraj. The necessaries of life should be enjoyed by you in common with those enjoyed by the princes and the moneyed men. But that does not mean that you should have palaces like theirs. They are not necessary for happiness. You or I would be lost in them. But you ought to get all the ordinary amenities of life that a rich man enjoys. I have not the slightest doubt that Swaraj is not *Purna* Swaraj until these amenities are guaranteed to you under it."

He clarified his concept of *Pūrṇa Svarāj* or complete independence as follows :

"...'Purna', complete, because it is as much for the prince as for the peasant, as much for the rich landowner as for the landless tiller of the soil, as much for the Hindus as for the Musalmans, as much for Parsis and Christians as for the Jains, Jews and Sikhs, irrespective of any distinction of caste or creed or status in life.

"The very connotation of the word and the means of its attainment to which we are pledged—truth and non-violence —precludes all possibility of that Swaraj being more for someone than for the other, being partial to some or prejudicial to others."[57]

Gandhi's Svarāj was egalitarian and secular. On the eve of his voyage to England in 1931, he said :

"It has been said that Indian Swaraj will be the rule of the majority community, i.e., the Hindus. There could not be greater mistake than that. If it were to be true, I for one would refuse to call it Swaraj and would fight it with all the strength at my command, for to me *Hind Swaraj is the rule of all the people, is the rule of justice.* Whether under that rule the ministers were Hindus or Musalmans

or Sikhs, and whether the legislatures were exclusively filled by the Hindus or Musalmans or any other community, they would have to do even-handed justice. And just as no community in India need have any fear of Swaraj being monopolized by any other, even so the English should have no fear. The question of safeguards should not arise at all. Swaraj would be real Swaraj only when there would be no occasion for safeguarding any such rights. I may tell you that the Congress does not belong to any particular group of men; it belongs to all, but the protection of the poor peasantry, which forms bulk of the population, must be its primary interest. *The Congress must, therefore, truly represent the poor.* But that does not mean that all other classes—the middle classes, the capitalists or zamindars—must go under. All that it aims at is that all other classes must subserve the interest of the poor."[58] (emphases added)

Again, "I will therefore state the purpose. It is complete freedom from the alien yoke in every sense of the term, and this for the sake of the dumb millions. Every interest, therefore, that is hostile to their interest, must be revised or must subside if it is not capable of revision."[59]

And freedom 'for the sake of the dumb millions' can never mean a form of political freedom merely for the sake of it, it must include economic freedom which alone enables the people to enjoy the fruits of political freedom. He knew well enough that political freedom, devoid of its economic content, was a mere philosophical abstraction. Gandhi was quite categorical and emphatic on this point. To quote him:

"Let there be no mistake about my conception of Swaraj. It is complete independence of alien control and complete economic independence. So at one end you have political independence, at the other the economic. It has two other ends. One of them is moral and social, the corresponding end is *Dharma*, i.e., religion in the highest sense of ths term... Let us call this the square of Swaraj, which will be out of shape if any of its angles is untrue."[60]

Reflections

A brief outline that we have drawn of Gandhi's concept of Svarāj is fairly suggestive. First, it was Gandhi who for the first time in Indian history gave a mass or democratic orientation to the concept of freedom. Political independence in the sense of transfer of power from one set of rulers to another set did not satisfy him. The freedom he sought was not merely the absence of alien bondage. It was something more than that. His perceptive mind could easily diagnose the basic malady of political self-government unaccompanied by economic freedom. It did not require him much intellectual attainment to see that politically free nations were nominally free in the sense that power did not belong to the people. This keen sense of reality led him to enunciate his ideal of Svarāj. As he was interested not in name but in the substance of things, it was only natural that he would prefer the content and not the shell or outward form of political self-rule. His politics was not power-oriented* in the current sense of the term. But he knew well enough that power was necessary as one of the means to enable the people to better their condition in every department of life. But power to whom ? Who will wield that power ? Gandhi did not suffer from equivocation on this point as was the case with many nationalist leaders of his time. The key point of his concept of Svarāj was that power must belong to the people. It was not legal sovereignty that he aspired to, the sovereignty or supreme power that he wanted was for the people at large. The people was not an abstract concept for him. A careful study of his writings would suggest that he meant by the people primarily the toiling people in the fields and factories. As India was (and still is) a predominantly agricultural country he spoke more in terms of the Indian peasants.** It is true indeed that he represented peasant

* "He [Gandhi] rejected the power motivation of politics and substituted instead the service motive."—Howard Boome Jacobson and Dana Raphael, 'India's Gandhism' in *Contemporary Political Ideologies*, ed., Joseph S. Roucek, Vision Press Ltd. London, 1961, p. 400.

** "Gandhi's vision was landlocked."—Asoka Mehta, *Studies in Asian Socialism*, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1959, p. 90.

India*—the real India as Gandhi used to call it—more than anybody else. It was for this toiling and suffering humanity that he wanted freedom—freedom from political subjugation, economic exploitation and social tyranny—and his concept of Svarāj evolved not out of academic theorizing but out of his personal encounter with living reality. He understood that constitutional Svarāj—a liberal political concept—would not touch the fringe of the basic maladies that India suffered from. His realistic mind and sensitive soul could see through the inadequacy of upper-class Svarāj—Svarāj of moneyed men and educated classes. That explains why he always insisted on poor man's or people's Svarāj.

Secondly, Gandhi believed that real Svarāj could only be established by awakening the masses into a sense of their power and dignity. This could only be achieved, he thought, through non-violent non-co-operation and ancillary programmes. He held that violent revolution would fail to bring about the desired state as it would, because of its inherent nature, bring political power to a minority section of the population, or to a party or the *élite* of that group. In that state of affairs the masses would have no effective power to exert their will since they would remain under the rule of that party. Such a condition is not Svarāj or rule of the masses. He was of the opinion that the non-violent method was a more potent weapon to bring about Svarāj for the masses. Non-violent strength would elevate the masses to a new sense of dignity and fortify the humblest of citizens to stand up to any authority, if power be abused. One may or may not subscribe to Gandhi's creed of non-violence—that is a matter of one's intellectual preference or philosophical commitment—but the argument he advanced in favour of ushering in Svarāj through non-violent revolution deserves proper consideration.

Thirdly, the true Svarāj that Gandhi envisaged was a multi-class Svarāj, no class or stratum of the society being excluded. While admitting that his inclination was towards

* "Gandhi is the representative of the peasant..."—S. Radhakrishnan in *Mahatma Gandhi : Essays & Reflections*, Jaico, Bombay, etc., 1956, p. 23.

the toiling masses and that he tried to a give a new dimension to the concept of national freedom, he at the same time, let it be noted, conceived of Svarāj as an all-class state. One may argue that this was in essence a bourgeois-liberal concept; its chief purpose being to enlist the support of the masses and mobilize them for gaining national sovereignty which would pave the way for native capitalist rule. One may further add that although he had sympathy for the masses, the theory of Gandhi was the philosophic rationalization of bringing about a bourgeois-democratic revolution and no farther than that. We submit that this sort of judgement flows from a mechanical understanding of the processes of history and of the role Gandhi played in Indian political life.

Gandhi indeed pleaded for a multi-class approach and an all-inclusive Svarāj composed of all classes. Here his Svarāj presents itself as 'not being partial to some or prejudicial to others', but at the same time he was emphatic in his statement that every interest, not subserving the interests of the poor, shall have to go under It was not merely a question of sympathy for the poor, as has often been made out; rather, it was more in the nature of a feeling of solidarity* and identification with the masses. And this oneness with the toiling people of India that he symbolized in his self—his thought, words and deeds—gave a new content to the basically bourgeois concept of nationalism. The Gandhian concept of Svadeśī and Svarāj marked a departure from the orthodox nationalist remedy. The remedy he suggested for putting an end to political domination and draining of national resources, was something different from the conventional capitalist way of setting things right. The poverty and exploitation of India he judged to be the result of its being drawn into the system of capitalism—'the vortex of mad and ruinous competition'. And that is why he, who was over-

* "Gandhi expresses this solidarity in his very way of life: this solidarity was not only verbal but existential."—William Robert Miller, 'The Dilemma of Middle Class Pacifism' in *Gandhi Marg*, vol. 4 No. 4, p. 303.

zealous about the individual power to resist exploitation, tried to introduce a new system of production. The remedy he suggested may be all wrong, but one cannot miss the bias in favour of the under-dogs which is more than pronounced.

Fourthly, one notices that Gandhi, who in *Hind Swaraj* was trenchant in his criticism of the parliamentary form of government, came to acquiesce in the demand for Parliamentary Svarāj. Here one should take the help of history to note that while endorsing the demand for parliamentary svarāj he did not forsake his earlier position enunciated in *Hind Swaraj*. It may be presumed that as the tallest leader of the nation he supported parliamentary svarāj as the immediate political objective, but as an ideal to strive for, he pinned his faith in 'Hind Swaraj', rule of all the people, or rule of justice as he called it. There was certainly a gulf between India of his dream and the immediate objective of the nation. As we have observed earlier, this gulf was not of his making, but it was in the given, concrete situation of India. His keen sense of realism found its expression in a letter he wrote to Jawaharlal Nehru as early as 1 April 1928: "I am quite of your opinion that some day we shall have to start an intensive movement without the rich people and without the vocal educated class. But that time is not yet."[61] Inauguration of a bourgeois-democratic state was on the agenda of history, with the class question remaining in the background, and as an astute politican he could well read the situation and he moved, he had to, within the confines of history.

Fifthly, his ideal of rule of justice or rule of all the people may be subjected to a fundamental criticism. Strictly speaking, rule of all the people is an amorphous term. A Marxist or even a Laski would argue that the state is not above classes. It does not transcend particular interests and lead to the expression of the total good of society. It is not a way of moving towards the fulfilment of the desires of its citizens. It does not seek to realize the rights they must claim in order to maintain the full dignity of their capacity as moral beings.[62] The fundamental question relates to the

basic postulates of social relations on which the state is based. Gandhi did not approach the problem of power from a class point of view. Considered from such a standpoint, Gandhi's theory suffers from limitations. This may be considered to be an element of weakness, but there are some positive points in Gandhi's favour. P. Spratt observes: "Gandhian scheme would not depend solely upon the interests of a class. It could probably mobilise both nationalistic and revolutionary idealism, and idealism is no less important than class-interest."[63]

One more point. His stress on the people as the ultimate repository and wielder of power—the bias remaining on the side of the downtrodden—carried a new note at a time when political freedom was conceived of as an end in itself. In the sense of giving a new jolt to the conventional way of political thinking, it was indeed a great departure and as such, Gandhi's concept of poor man's or people's svarāj bears an impress of its own.

Personal and Civic Freedom

Personal and civic freedom is the foundation of political freedom.

Gandhi upheld the dignity and authority of the individual throughout his life. He advocated and fought for recognition of civic freedom. In Champaran, where he conducted his first struggle in India, he was served with a notice (dated 16 April, 1917) to leave the district. But he refused to comply with the directive and a summons was served on Gandhi to appear before the court. He pleaded guilty and read a brief statement before the court wherein he said: "I have disregarded the order served upon me not for want for respect for lawful authority, but in obedience to the higher law of our being, the voice of conscience."[64] Gandhi was of the opinion that "The person of a citizen must be held inviolate. It can only be touched to arrest or to prevent violence."[65] As a true democrat, he upheld the principle of freedom of opinion. Genuine democracy means that public opinion in a

real sense is self-forming. Gandhi wrote : "Public opinion alone can keep a society pure and healthy."[66] There can be no public opinion without free press, free platform, free association, etc. In an article in *Young India* (12.1.22) entitled 'Liberty of The Press', he wrote : "Liberty of speech means that it is unassailed, even when the speech hurts ; liberty of the press can be said to be truly respected only when the press can comment in the severest terms upon and even misrepresent matters, protection against misrepresentation or violence being secured not by an administrative gagging order, not by closing down the press but by punishing the real offender, leaving the press itself unrestricted. Freedom of association is truly respected when assemblies of people can discuss even revolutionary projects, the state relying upon the force of public opinion and the civil police, not the savage military at its disposal, to crush any actual outbreak of revolution that is designed to confound public opinion and the state representing it."[67] The Karachi Congress in its Fundamental Rights Resolution guaranteed the civic freedoms, viz. Freedom of Association and Combination, Freedom of Speech and of the Press, Freedom of Conscience, Religious Freedom, etc. Gandhi's hand in drafting the resolution is too well known to be recounted here. Writing in 1939 in connexion with the States' peoples' movement, he observed : "Civil liberty consistent with the observance of non-violence is the first step towards Swaraj. It is the foundation of freedom. And there is no room there for dilution or compromise. It is the water of life. I have never heard of water being diluted."[68] With the outbreak of the Second World War, India was made a party to the war. Rigorous curbs were put on civil liberties of the Indian people. Gandhi strongly pleaded in 1940 for freedom of speech as an invlolable fundamental right of the citizen, even during the pendency of war. "I claim the liberty of going through the streets of Bombay and say that I shall have nothing to do with this war and in this fratricide that is now going on in Europe."[69] He wrote : ".. freedom of speech and corresponding action is the breath of democratic

life. Freedom of propagating non-violence as substitute for war is the most relevant when indecent savagery is being perpetrated by the warring nations of Europe."[70] In a speech before the AICC meeting in September 1940, he said: "Freedom of speech and pen is the foundation of Swaraj. If foundation stone is in danger, you have to exert the whole of your might in order to defend that single stone."[71] Explaining his mind at a greater length, he observed: "But if they [the British] fight unto death for their freedom and if they are reasonable, they must recognize our right of free speech. ...It is our duty to fight for that right. ...This liberty is a concrete issue, which needs no defining. It is the foundation of freedom, especially when it has to be taken non-violently. To surrender it, is to surrender the only means for attaining freedom."[72]

Synthesis of Svarāj and Svarāj

To Gandhi, freedom or Svarāj was an all-inclusive concept—political, economic, social and moral. He called this "the square of Swaraj" (see p. 372 *supra*). It was but natural for a man who conceived life as an organic whole to define Svarāj in this manner. Gandhi observed in *Hind Swaraj* that: "Real home-rule is self-control."[73] He always insisted on this subjective aspect of freedom throughout his life for it was an article of faith with him. Once again reiterating his personal faith in the ideas enunciated in that booklet, he wrote in 1920: "Goverment over self is the truest Swaraj, it is synonymous with *moksha* or salvation."[74] Or, "for me the movement of Swaraj is a movement of self-purification."[75] He held that the "first step to Swaraj lies in the individual."[76] The same idea was elaborated further. "Self-government depends entirely upon our own internal strength, upon our ability to fight against the heaviest odds. Indeed, self-government which does not require that continuous striving to attain it and to sustain it, is not worth the name. I have therefore endeavoured to show both in word and in deed, that political self-government—that is self-government for a

large number of men and women,—is no better than individual self-government, and therefore, it is to be attained by precisely the same means that are required for individual self-government or self-rule."[77] Similarly, he wrote in 1939: "Swaraj of a people means the sum total of the Swaraj of individuals."[78] Freedom or Svarāj, as Gandhi conceived it, is wider than political independence. "The word Swaraj is a sacred word, a Vedic word, meaning self-rule and self-restraint, and not freedom from all restraint which 'independence' often means."[79] Citations from Gandhi's writings can be multiplied to show that he pinned his faith in self-*Svarāj* as of prime importance in the fight for Svarāj in the collective sphere. Gandhi taught that "there is no greatness except greatness within one's own kind; no universality except the universality within one's own province; no freedom except the freedom within one's own belonging."[80]

Gandhi believed in the dictum, 'life is larger than living'. And he wanted to see life grounded on moral principles without which life loses its significance. Freedom is the basic recognition of this morality, for there can be no morality without freedom. Freedom is thus a right, which is inherent in every individual, conferring upon him the power of doing things worth doing. Man is often called a being of the senses subject to natural necessities. But he is a rational being, and hence free.[81] Reason is supposed to be the very basis of Gandhian philosophy, and reason is defined, not in terms of history or hypostatized organizations, but in terms of the individual himself.

True freedom, as Gandhi conceived it, is obedience to law, not so much to law in the narrow legal sense but to moral law, the inner conscience, the law of one's true being. It impels man to seek the good and attain it. All desires that are in harmony with this end are worthy. If subjective desires act as a brake on one's moral progress, they have to be suppressed. Freedom as reason implies self-control or restraint and self-transcending dedication to a noble cause or object. In such a concept of freedom, reason and will (not actual but real) become identical in being the expression of the self-

realizing principle. The will is determined by its object which, in turn, is determined by the end. Ultimately, therefore, it is self-determined and free.[82]

Such freedom, as Gandhi conceived it, is conquest over self. Constant vigilance and continuous striving alone can enable a man to acquire this mastery over self. Fearlessness is the first thing indispensable for attaining freedom. He urged upon his followers and the people to shed all traces of fear.

"Fearlessness connotes freedom from all external fear,—fear of disease, bodily injury and death, of dispossession, of losing one's nearest and dearest, of losing reputation or giving offence, and so on."[83]

And further, "...we must give up all external fears. But the internal foes we must always fear. We are rightly afraid of animal passion, anger, and the like. External fears cease of their own accord, when once we have conquered these traitors within the camp. All such fears revolve round the body as the centre, and will therefore disappear, as soon as we get rid of attachment for the body. We thus find, that all external fear is the baseless fabric of our own vision. Fear has no place in our hearts, when we have shaken off attachment for wealth, for family and the body."[84] In his opinion, "The votary of non-violence has to cultivate the capacity of the highest type in order to be free from fear. He recks not if he should lose his land, his wealth, his life. He who has not overcome all fear cannot practise *ahimsa* to perfection. The votary of *ahimsa* has only one fear, that is of God."[85]

Freedom involves an arduous discipline. Hence he stressed upon rigid adherence to the code of *Mahāvratas* (see p. 33 *supra*). He urged upon his followers never to doubt the necessity of vows for the purpose of self-purification and self-realization.[86]

Hindu philosophy teaches that freedom can be obtained only through bonds of discipline and surrender of personal inclination. To secure the freedom to acquire and to enjoy we have to limit ourselves and bind our will in certain

ways.[87] Gandhi adhered to this concept of self-discipline and purification.

Freedom, thus conceived, is freedom only for the ideal, and not for the actual. Gandhi held that the individual is free to speak the truth, not free to lie ; free to serve, not to exploit ; free to sacrifice himself, but not free to kill or injure

Gandhi's ideas on sex and *Brahmacarya* which have often been referred to as 'the great obsessions' of his mind have to be understood in the context of his views on inner freedom. To quote Gandhi : "The conquest of lust is the highest endeavour of a man or woman's existence. Without overcoming lust man cannot hope to rule over self. And without rule over self there can be no Swaraj or *Rama Raj*. Rule of all without rule over self would prove to be as deceptive and disappointing as a painted toy-mango, charming to look at outwardly but hollow and empty within. No worker who has not overcome lust can hope to render any genuine service to the cause of Harijans, communal unity, Khadi, cow-protection or village reconstruction. Great causes like these cannot be served by intellectual equipment alone, they call for spiritual effort or soul-force. Soul-force comes only through God's grace, and God's grace never descends upon a man who is a slave to lust."[88]

Gandhi's insistence on *brahmacarya* as a discipline of natural instincts and impulses earned him the reputation of being an ascetic. But Gandhi refused to be called an ascetic. For a student of political theory, it would be a sort of intrusion to try to delve deep into his inner mind for such 'asceticism'. Leaving the field open for the psychoanalyst to undertake such a study, we can better appreciate it in the background of his philosophy which evolved out of the cultural milieu he lived in and of his personal experience. A close look at his 'asceticism' would suggest that he developed this attitude for disciplining life not from any abstract and academic point of view, rather the logic and compulsion of public life—a life of service and struggle—led him to adopt

this view.* Let Gandhi speak for himself: "It is wrong to call me an ascetic. The ideals that regulate my life are presented for acceptance by mankind in general. I have have arrived at them by gradual evolution. Every step was thought out, well-considered, and taken with the greatest deliberation. *Both my continence and non-violence were derived from personal experience and became necessary in response to the calls of public duty.* The isolated life I had to lead in South Africa whether as a householder, legal practitioner, social reformer or politician, required, for the due fulfilment of these duties, the strictest regulation of sexual life and a rigid practice of non-violence and truth in human relations..."[89] (emphasis added)

Gandhi's *Autobiography* records how he came to accept and practise *brahmacarya*. During the period of Zulu 'rebellion' (1906) he became convinced that *brahmacarya* and voluntary poverty were essential for public service. On his return to Phoenix, he took a vow on both the subjects. The sexual restraint which he had been observing since 1900 had been mainly for a qualitatively inferior object. Even at this period he took the vow not with the religious purpose of attaining the vision of God, but in the interests of public service. *Brahmacarya* was yet to develop as an essential discipline for attaining *mokṣa* or salvation. In the *Autobiography* we read: "It was borne in upon me that I should have more and more occasions for service of the kind I was rendering, and that I should find myself unequal to my task if I were engaged in the pleasures of family life and in the propagation and rearing of children.

"In a word, I could not live both after the flesh and the spirit. On the present occassion ['nursing the wounded Zulus'], for instance, I should not have been able to throw myself

* The idea of renunciation was for Gandhi, Dr. Verrier Elwin observed, "a temporary ethic, an ethic for an interim period." "When he [Gandhi] told his followers", Dr. Elwin continued, "that they mustn't marry, that they must have no sexual relations, it was not out of any absolute spiritual philosophy, it was rather a political expedient for the time being. And we must remember that for him ethics and politics were the same."—Francis Watson and Maurice Brown, *Talking of Gandhiji*, Orient Longmans, Bombay Calcutta Madras, 1957, p. 28.

into the fray, had my wife been expecting a baby. Without the observance of *brahmacharya* service of the family would be inconsistent with the service of the community. With *brahmacharya* they would be perfectly consistent."[90]

Again, "But", Gandhi told Mrs. Polak, "you do believe that people who have a great mission or work to do should not spend their energy and time in caring for a little family when they are called to a bigger field of work ?"[91]

Brahmacarya, according to Gandhi, is a necessary disciplining factor in the life of a public servant. It is not, as with the medieval Christians and as is sometimes argued, a case of mortification of flesh for its own sake.* "It may be harmful to suppress the body, if the mind is at the same time allowed to go astray."[92] Gandhi insisted that desires should be rationalized and synthesized in an integrated life in order to attain the moral height which differentiates man from the brute.

* Prof. Benoy Gopal Ray observes : "He [Gandhi] did not mortify his flesh as did the medieval ascetics."—*Gandhian Ethics*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1950, p. 55.

J. B. Kripalani says : "...in no healthy normal society can his life be considered as one of the mortification of the flesh."—Quoted in Ray, op. cit., p. 56.

P. Spratt holds a different view. To quote him : "Some of the expressions Mr. Gandhi uses about Brahmacharya suggest mediaeval Christian rather than Hindu asceticism. Brahmacharya is esteemed by Hindu tradition as part of an ascetic discipline, but there did not develop from this point of view which was commonly held by the early and mediaeval Christian propagandists—it is far from dead even now—that sexuality is peculiarly degrading and sinful. He uses terms—'beastly' and so forth—which recall the Christian middle ages and Victorian England."—*Gandhism : An Analysis*, The Huxley Press, Madras, 1939, p. 150.

Elsewhere, quoting Mrs. Polak's reference to Gandhi's "preference for the uncomfortable", he comments : "It is evident that...asceticism for its own sake had become his habit"—ibid., p. 80.

We agree with Spratt that Gandhi's concept of *brahmacarya* was different from the traditional Hindu concept. Gandhi's ideas on sex might lend the impression that he was more a medieval Christian in outlook, or a Buddhist, as was alleged by Tagore. Gandhi himself admitted that his ideas on *brahmacarya* had been modified by his long contact with the West. (N. K. Bose, *My Days With Gandhi*, Nishana, 1953 Calcutta, p. 174.) His intimate Christian association, it may be presumed, cast a permanent influence on his concept of sin, purity and sexual morality.

Prof. N. K. Bose observes : "he [Gandhi] represented a hard, puritanic form of self-discipline, something which we usually associate with mediaeval Christain ascetics or Jain recluses."—ibid.

The essential point in our study would, however, be to find out the roots of his developing such an idea.

Another postulate of the enshrinement of Svarāj as moral and spiritual freedom is *anāsakti* which comes as the consequence of will and reason leading to concentration of energy. The *Gītā* taught him this lesson. Renunciation, according to Gandhi, does not mean abandoning the world and retiring into the forest.[93] Gandhi who consecrated his life to the service of his fellow-Indians and humanity at large could only say that 'there is no higher law than the law of *Yajna*, the Law of Service.'

Gandhi's attitude towards freedom was integral. He held that "The outward freedom that we shall attain will be in exact proportion to the inward freedom to which we may have grown at a given moment."[94] This being his view of freedom, it was but logical that he would insist that "our chief energy must be concentrated upon achieving reform from within."[95] While Gandhi insisted on individual reform he certainly did not ignore the external conditions necessary for attaining true freedom. His life-long struggle against racial discrimination, colonial subjugation, social tyranny and economic exploitation and his advocacy of and organized effort for moral regeneration of man bear testimony that he had a comprehensive and integral concept of freedom.

Reflections

Gandhi approached the problem of freedom from the philosophic idealist point of view. And that was in harmony with his basic approach towards moral and spiritual matters. His philosophical convictions provide an adequate background for such a concept of freedom. One may, according to one's own philosophical commitment, accept or reject his view of freedom as authentic or otherwise, but that does not make any the less rewarding our study of his concept. One need not be a Gandhite to analyse and appreciate the essential points of his philosophy of freedom, which has extra-philosophical and sociological significance.

The essential points that a student of social and political theory finds in the Gandhian concept of moral freedom are as follows :

First, the individual is the pillar of Svarāj. This emphasis on the individual characterizes Gandhi's concept of Svarāj. Gandhi, as has been noted earlier, believed in the sanctity and moral authority of the individual. Does it lead to unrestricted individualism ? Certainly not. Gandhi was for striking a mean between individual freedom and social restraint.[96] Gandhi's individualism was not of the Hindu salvationist type. In Gandhi's opinion, *mokṣa* or salvation has to be attained in course of and through active participation in mundane affairs. He earnestly believed in the divine spark in all men. His insistence on individual Svarāj or reform from within has to be understood from a different plane. Gandhi lived and moved in India which was typically "a community of obedience" as opposed to a "community of will", to borrow an expression from H. G. Wells. In this objective background what was necessary was an unimpeachable character and conduct and and a grim determination based on ironing of wills. He faced a country where degradation in all walks of life paralysed the spirit of the people. Cultivation of the bourgeois ideals of individual character and conduct could only give a new shock to torpid condition of our country at that time. Stripped of its religious coverings—religion was of prime importance to Gandhi though—this call for inculcation of individual virtues, like the qualities of discipline, a voluntary loyalty and solidarity, and some degree of internal freedom, signified a new outlook of life. And Gandhi was engaged in the task of imparting this sort of outlook to the Indian people.[97]

Secondly, he realized that an inert and emasculated people would never be able to attain freedom. Therefore, he went to the root of the weakness of the people. He knew that for straightening the backs of the semi-paralysed people and for galvanizing the spirit of the nation, a new set of values had to be introduced. Individual consciousness alone, Gandhi perhaps thought, could lift the people out of the rut of servile life. And that was why, it seems, he tried to tackle the problems of life at the individual level.

Thirdly, Gandh considered weakness, cowardice and fear as sins against the human spirit. *Abhaya* or fearlessness was the greatest legacy that Gandhi bestowed upon us.[98] Fear of imprisonment, fear of loss of property and fear of death demoralized the spirit and crippled the growth of the Indian people. His first task was to revive the spirit of self-respect of his countrymen. Once this was done, resistance to evil would be easy. He carried the message of fearlessness. The message was to be given a concrete shape. During the non-co-operation days he asked his followers to overcome the fear of imprisonment. Once the fear of jail had disappeared, he felt that the time had come for a second step. Civil Disobedience movement sought to destroy the fear of impoverishment and loss of property. And then the last step, 'Do or Die'—one must risk death to attain freedom. He made heroes out of common clay. This was indeed a positive achievement.

Fourthly, self-restraint or self-denial, as he sometimes called it, which caused a lot of furore and hostile criticism, should be viewed with an objective detachment. *Brahmacarya*, as Gandhi explained it, may not be acceptable to a modern man of scientific temperament. But Gandhi's personal faith apart, *brahmacarya* as a disciplining factor in the sense of self-training, control of mind and body, should be looked upon as a device for enabling the *satyāgrahī* to devote himself to service. *Brahmacarya* which means control of all the organs of sense[99] might have been particularly necessary for Gandhi in his struggle with himself. He himself admitted* that his mind was of the "extroverted type".[100] We have traced in our earlier discussion how the idea of *brahmacarya* germinated in his mind. Gandhi's *brahmacarya*, disguised, unfortunately but perhaps inevitably, under a religious covering, was in its inspiration primarily secular. One may not accept his theory of *brahmacarya*, but the inspiration is not to be missed.

Finally, a puritan discipline, however disagreeable it might appear and howsoever much one does not like to accept it as an absolute principle of life as was urged upon by Gandhi on

* In reply to P. Spratt's question.

some occasions, should be related to the historical situation when the code of discipline was enunciated and sought to be made a part of one's régime. Thus considered, the puritan discipline of self-conquest, non-attachment, renunciation, etc., might have had its relevance in the days when it was presented for acceptance. Dedication to a cause demands self-control or restraint, another name for which is, acccording to Gandhi, personal *svarāj*. Gandhi was right when he said that "the path of service can hardly be trodden by one, who is not prepared to renounce self-interest".[101]* One may hold that the Gandhian discipline is too exacting for human nature as it is ; one may reject the Gandhian schema for its unrelatedness to the basic urges of human life and for its puritanical strain and overemphasis on individual reform ; but the key point of service and sacrifice as ideals to be sought for, for which this rigorous discipline was conceived in the first instance, has its validity even today when the objective conditions have changed as compared to the days when this doctrine was propounded.

Rights

Closely allied to the concept of freedom is the theory of Rights. As a votary of freedom and dignity of the individual, Gandhi championed throughout his political life the rights of the racially humiliated, colonially subjugated, economically dispossessed and socially depressed humanity. The theory of *satyāgraha* is based on the notion of the individual's inalienable right to resist a coercive social and political system. He hoisted the standard of non-violent revolt against injustice, bondage and denial of rights. In all his activities a passionate desire for the reign of right is evident. Whether in South Africa, or in India, he championed the cause of individual conscience as against the forcibly imposed dictates of political power. We need not recount here the glorious and singular role played by him for the assertion of civil and political rights. One commentator has aptly remarked :

* "Gandhi renounced in order to serve."—Louis Fischer, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi*, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1955, Part I, p. 170.

"Gandhi's philosophy of right is a cardinal point in his philosophy of politics."[102] As the prophet of *satyāgraha*, he stood for the inalienable moral right of man to stand against untruth and injustice. But one of the greatest fighters for the assertion and vindication of human rights that he was, he was also a constructive thinker. He stressed the correlation between rights and duties.

Gandhi thought that rights are the opportunity for self-realization. They are innate in the sense in which moral values are innate.* *Vedānta* teaches that right to self-realization accrues through self-culture and spiritual self-determination of the reason-endowed individual, free, equal and divine in nature. The way to self-realization is the realization of one's spiritual unity with others by serving them and doing one's duty to them. It is in one's duty towards the social good that the true source of rights is to be found. This was one of his basic tenets which changed very little with time. Gandhi, who believed in the *Gītā* gospel of selfless action, wrote in 1925 :

"The true source of rights is duty. If we all discharge our duties, rights will not be far to seek. If leaving duties unperformed we run after rights, they escape us like a will-o'-the wisp. The more we pursue them, the farther will they fly. The same teaching has been embodied by Krishna in the immortal words : 'Action alone is thine—Leave thou the fruit severely alone.' Action is duty : fruit is the right."[103]

And, "No people have risen who thought only of rights. Only those did so who thought of duties. Out of the performance of duties flow rights, and those that knew and performed their duties came naturally by the rights. ...He

* Dr. B. S. Sharma in his study cites a parallel statement by Green : "They [rights] are innate or natural in the sense in which according to Aristotle the state is natural ; not in the sense that they actually exist when a man is born and that they have actually existed as long as the human race, but that they arise out of, and are necessary for the fulfilment of, a moral capacity without which a man would not be a man. There cannot be innate rights in any other sense than that in which they are innate duties, of which, however, much less has been heard."—*Gandhi As A Political Thinker*, Indian Press (Publications) Pvt. Ltd., Allahabad, 1956, pp. 73-4.

who thinks not of the right gets it, and he who thinks of it loses it. That is the rule of conduct which I would like to place before you."[104]

While championing the cause of equal right of every man to the necessaries of life, he stressed on the corresponding duty. He wrote in 1931 :

"Every man has an equal right to the necessaries of life even as birds and beasts have. And since every right carries with it a corresponding duty and the corresponding remedy for resisting any attack upon it, it is merely a matter of finding out the corresponding duties and remedies to vindicate the elementary fundamental equality. The corresponding duty is to labour with my limbs and the corresponding remedy is to non-co-operate with him who deprives me of the fruit of my labour."[105]

Similarly, he said in 1939 : "Rights accrue automatically to him who duly performs his duties. In fact the rights to perform one's duties is the only right that is worth living for and dying for. It covers all legitimate rights. All the rest is grab under one guise or another and contains in it seeds of *himsa*."[106]

In a cable to H. G. Wells, in reply to his On The Rights of Man, Gandhi wrote : "You will permit me to say that you are on the wrong track. I feel sure that I can draw up a better charter of rights than you have drawn up. But what good will it be ? Who will become its guardian ? If you mean propaganda or popular education, you have begun at the wrong end. I suggest the right way. Begin with a charter of Duties of Man, and I promise the rights will follow as spring follows winter. I write from experience. As a young man I began my life by seeking to assert my rights, and I soon discovered that I had none—not even over my wife. So I began by discovering and performing my duty by my wife, my children, my friends, companions and society, and I find today that I have greater rights, perhaps, than any living man I know. If this is too tall a claim, then I say I do not know anyone who possesses greater rights than I."[107]

In the same vein he told Julian Huxley, the then Director-General of UNESCO, in 1947 :

"I learnt from my illiterate but wise mother that all rights to be deserved and preserved come from duty well done. Thus the very right to live accrues to us only when we do the duty of citizenship of the world. From this very fundamental standpoint perhaps it is easy enough to define the duties of man and woman and correlate every right to some corresponding duty to be first performed. Every other right can be shown to be a usurpation hardly worth fighting for."[108]

While repudiating "the divine right of kings to rule" he at the same time spoke against "the unabashed assertion of rights of the hitherto downtrodden millions" as equally injurious.[109]

The Gandhian theory of rights lays emphasis on social service rather than on self-regarding propensities of the individual. As Gandhi wrote : "...people who obtain rights as a result of performance of duty, exercise them only for the service of society, never for themselves."[110]

Gandhi's position is quite in contrast to that of the Utilitarians for whom the assertion of rights is more fundamental than the performance of duties.[111] As is known to a student of political theory, Bentham advocated that rights properly so-called are the creatures of law properly so-called. But for Gandhi, rights are created, not by the state or any other group, but by the individual himself as he acquires and develops fitness for the right by the pursuit of *satya* and *ahiṃsā*. The state does not create rights ; it only recognizes rights. Individual freedom and social obligation being not incompatible, in Gandhian thought,[112] rights will not require the long arms of the state for their enforcement in the ideal society envisaged by him.

Gandhi's emphasis on duties as being prior to rights may lend the impression that his outlook was conservative. The conservative view holds that duty is of greater importance and priority than right. The citizen finds his duties as a member of a given section of society. It is his moral obligation to fulfil these duties. In one of Gandhi's writings on the subject

one comes across a statement of like nature. He wrote in 1939 : "...rights of true citizenship accrue only to those who serve the state to which they belong."[113] But was Gandhi truly a conservative ? Dr. Bondurant's observations deserve attention. She says : "In traditional Hindu polity, emphasis upon duty is extended to the king. The king, above all others, is obliged to fulfil his kingly duties towards his people, and proper fulfilment of such duties is the sole justification for expecting his subjects to obey him. Gandhi, who would make every man a king, consistently emphasized duties as prior to rights. But the effect of his reasoning was not precisely conservative in nature."[114] "Rights accrue automatically to him who duly performs his duties", Gandhi wrote. But these rights, Bondurant argues, are not to be rigidly confined to rank and order on the conservative structuring of society arising out of caste. (For a discussion of Gandhi's views on Caste & Varṇa, see pp. 175 ff. *supra*)

Gandhian rights, fundamentally, are rights to pursue and realize values. The supreme right of human freeedom, then, becomes not merely an absence of restraint, the detachment of the individual from all relations and bonds, but freedom to achieve things, made possible only (a) by the overcoming of obstacles and (b) by assuming the obligations of co-operative effort. Gandhi's emphasis on duty as prior to rights can be explained in terms of the social obligation that an individual owes. Other-regarding activites or devotion to an ego-transcending cause implies service. Service is the outward expression of an obligation that an individual feels for other selves and for the society as a whole. Service was the master-passion with him as we have said elsewhere. His concept of Svarāj as personal *Svarāj* underlies this assumption of the obligation of individuals to co-operative effort. This subjective stress in Gandhian thought is evident in all his writings It was his sincere belief that only reformed individuals could realize freedom, the supreme right, and that reformation from within enables one to stand up against unjust and immoral laws of the state. Thus he synthesized the relation between rights and duties.

On Equality and Justice

Liberty to be authentic must be accompanied by equality. Gandhi was an ardent champion of equality—the term being understood in its comprehensive sense. The Gandhian theory of rights incorporates political, racial, social and economic equality. Engelman said of Rousseau : "Equality to him is as precious as liberty and the great proprietor who makes men poor is for him, as detestable as the despot who makes men slaves. Social injustice and political injustice sustain themselves mutually." As one reviewer of Gandhian philosophy of state has rightly observed : "Almost every word of this estimate of the greatest political thinker of France is true of Gandhiji."[115]

Equality did not mean for Gandhi dead uniformity. He said : 'All men are born equal and free' is not nature's law in the literal sense. All men are not born equal in intellect, for instance, but the doctrine of equality will be vindicated if those who have superior intellect will use it not for self-advancement at the expense of others, but for the service of those who are less favoured in that respect than they."[116] But biological inequality, or what Prof. Haldane has called the inherent 'inequality' of man, apart, inequality in the social and economic sphere is the core of the social problem. Gandhi was alive to this aspect of the problem. While the Rousseauic dictum is not true in the literal sense, it is true in the sense that all have a moral right to equal opportunity. Equal opportunity is the indispensable condition for the full flowering of individuality which, in Gandhi's opinion, lies at the root of all progress.

We need not recount here how he reacted to racial inequality in South Africa, to social inequality in the form of untouchability in India, or to economic inequality between the haves and the have-nots in this country. A detailed discussion of his concept of economic equality has been made earlier (see p. 247 ff. *supra*). He devoted his life to the removal of untouchability which was the source of social inequality (for his views, see p. 182 ff. *supra*). The main point underlying

his concept of socio-economic equality may be summarized in his own language. He wrote : "I want to bring about an equalization of status. The working classes have all these centuries been isolated and relegated to a lower status. They have been *shoodras*, and the word has been interpreted to mean an inferior status. I want to allow no differentation between the son of a weaver, of an agriculturist and of a school-master."[117]

One of the main problems in society which drew Gandhi's attention was the social status of women. Gandhi's role in the cause of regeneration of Indian women is too well known to be recapitulated here. As for his views on the subject, let us cite a few of the many observations he made as and when occasions demanded. As early as 1921, he wrote : "I passionately desire the utmost freedom for our women...Women must have votes and an equal legal status." "But", he continued, "the problem does not end there. It only commences at the point where women begin to affect the political deliberations of the nation."[118] He could visualize women only "as man's companion, gifted with equal mental capacities," possessing "the right to participate in every minute detail in the activities of man" and "an equal right of freedom and liberty with him."[119] Gandhi was emphatic in his assertion that "Women will enjoy the same rights as men."[120] He regarded legislation for removing the inequalities between men and women as essential. But in consonance with his general approach towards social problems, he considered it better for the enlightened women of India to fight for the repeal of all legal disqualifications and the abolition of all social discriminations : "...every right in a non-violent society proceeds from the previous performance of a duty, it follows that rules of social conduct must be framed by co-operation and consultation. They can never be imposed from outside."[121]

The Gandhian theory of equality was rooted in his basic faith in the dignity of the individual. A moral reverence for life suggests equality of all men. His belief that "We are all equal before our Maker—Hindus, Musalmans, Parsis, Christians, worshippers of one God"[122] was the philosophical foundation

of his theory of equality. His deep concern for social and economic justice was integrally related to his creed of non-violence, for justice was the first condition of non-violence.

On Democracy

The idea of democracy has had a long lineage from the Greek City-States to modern times. Some are of the opinion that it is a mistake to think that it is only a western concept. Democracies and republics, like that of the Vrjis at the time of the Buddha (Sixth century B. C.) were working in India centuries before Christ and probably some of them were earlier than the Greek republics. It is not necessary for us to trace its history here. The idea is simple. In the political sphere, it is the idea of participation by the whole community in the political process. It bases political authority on the will of individuals who by a process of co-operation make decisions that are binding on all. This is the modern parliamentary democratic form of Government. The basic assumption on which parliamentary government rests relates to the nature of society it presupposes. It is the well-known assumption of 'natural harmony' between man and man and between individuals and society. But democracy is not so much a form as a principle of government, and not only a principle of government, but a principle of social life. That is say, democracy is not only a form of political system, it is also a way of life. Gandhi considered democracy from the standpoint of that larger principle of social life. He scathingly criticized the governments which, in their institutional basis and political form, were democratic, but from the philosophical standpoint or the end-point of view, were negations of the same.

Gandhi held that violence and democracy were incompatible. It is only on the basis of unadulterated *ahiṃsā* that genuine democracy can be built up. Both non-violence and democracy are but means ; the end is obviously to attain and establish a universal community of human beings which shall be peaceful, happy and progressive in the physical, intellectual, moral and spiritual fields and which shall give,

at the same time, full and free scope to each man and woman to attain the highest he or she is capable of ; or in other words, the end is the full flowering of one's personality.

Gandhi's theory of democracy wiil be discussed in three sections : (i) Critique of Western Parliamentary Democracy, (ii) Views on institutional basis of Democracy and (iii) Foundations of Democracy.

Critique of Western Parliamentary Democracy

Hind Swaraj contains Gandhi's indictment of the British parliamentary practices and procedures. To quote him :

'That which you consider to be the Mother of Parliaments is like a sterile woman and a prostitute. Both these are harsh terms, but exactly fit the case. That Parliament has not yet, of its own accord, done a single good thing. Hence I have compared it to a sterile woman. The natural condition of that Parliament is such that, without outside pressure, it can do nothing. It is like a prostitute because it is under the control of ministers who change from time to time.

"...as a matter of fact, it is generally acknowledged that the members are hypocritical and selfish. Each thinks of his own little interest. It is fear that is the guiding motive. ...When the greatest questions are debated, its members have been seen to stretch themselves and to doze. Sometimes the members talk away until the listeners are disgusted. Carlyle has called it the 'talking shop of the world'. Members vote for their party without a thought. Their so-called discipline binds them to it. ...Parliament is simply a costly toy of the nation.

"...they [the Prime Ministers] cannot be considered really patriotic. ...I do not hesitate to say that they have neither real honesty nor a living conscience.

"If India copies England, it is my firm conviction that she will be ruined."[123]

Gandhi wrote to Maganlal Gandhi on April 2, 1910 :

"It is very difficult to get rid of our fondness for Parliament. It was no doubt barbarous when people tore off the skin, burned

persons alive and cut off their ears or nose ; but the tyranny of Parliament is much greater than that of Chengiz Khan, Tamerlane and others...Modern tyranny is a trap of temptation and therefore does greater mischief. One can withstand the atrocities committed by one individual as such ; but it is difficult to cope with the tyranny perpetrated upon a people in the name of the people. ...The common man in India at last believes that the Parliament is a hoax."[124]

We have seen in our earlier discussion on Svarāj that Gandhi accepted Parliamentary Svarāj as the immediately realizable objective of the nation. While he did not forsake the ideal pictured in *Hind Swaraj*, his 'corporate activity was undoubtedly devoted to the attainment of Parliamentary Swaraj' (*Young India*, 26 January, 1921). The compulsion of the given stage of development of the nationalist struggle might have dictated him to take up this position as we have argued earlier. But he was alive to the basic malady of parliamentary democracies. In 1925, he wrote : "The peoples of Europe have no doubt political power but no Swaraj. Asian and African races are exploited for their partial benefit, and they, on their part, are being exploited by the ruling class or caste under the sacred name of democracy." (also cited in our discussion on Svarāj, see p. 368 *supra*).

In 1938, he wrote : "Democracy of the West is, in my opinion, only so-called. It has germs in it, certainly of the true type. But it can only come when all violence is eschewed and malpractices disappear. The two go hand in hand. Indeed malpractice is a species of violence. If India is to evolve the true type, there should be no compromise with violence or untruth."[125]

In another issue of *Harijan* of the same year (1938), he wrote : "Democracy and violence can ill go together. The states that are today nominally democratic have either to become frankly totalitarian or, if they are to become truly democratic, they must become courageously non-violent."[126]

The Euramerican democracies were exposed to Gandhi's trenchant criticism, for they were not, from the standpoint of

non-violence, *qualitatively* different from the states which tore off their democratic veil. Writing in 1939, Gandhi remarked :

"The democracies, therefore, that we see at work in England, America and France are only so-called, because they are no less based on violence than Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy or even Soviet Russia. The only difference is that the violence of the last three is much better organized than that of the three democratic powers. Nevertheless we see today a mad race for outdoing one another in the matter of armaments. And if, when the clash comes, as it is bound to come one day, the democracies win, they will do so only because they have the backing of their peoples who *imagine* that they have a voice in their own government, whereas in the other three cases the peoples might rebel against their own dictatorships."[127] (emphasis added)

An American journalist trekked to Sevagram in April 1940 for an interview with Gandhi which was in the form of questions and answers.

Q. "Why do you say that democracy can only be saved through non-violence ?"

A. "Because democracy, so long as it is sustained by violence, cannot provide for or protect the weak. My notion of democracy is that under it the weakest should have the same opportunity as the strongest. That can never happen except through non-violence. No country in the world today shows any but patronizing regard for the weak. The weakest, you say, go to the wall. Take your own case. Your land is owned by a few capitalist owners. The same is true of South Africa. These large holdings cannot be sustained except by violence, veiled if not open. *Western democracy, as it functions today, is diluted Nazism or Fascism.** At best it is merely a cloak to hide the Nazi and the Fascist tendencies of imperialism. Why is there the war today if it is not for the satisfaction of the desire to share the spoils ? It was not through democratic methods that Britain bagged India. What is the meaning of South African

* cf. "There are no Democracies in the West. They are only rank plutocracies, all of them now fascist to the finger-tips."—George Bernard Shaw

democracy ? Its very constitution has been drawn to protect the white man against the coloured man, the natural occupant. Your own history is perhaps blacker still, inspite of what the Northern States did for the abolition of slavery. The way you have treated the Negro presents a discreditable record. And it is to save such democracies that the war is being fought ! There is something very hypocritical about it."[128] (emphasis added)

We make no apology for reproducing a rather longish excerpt, for this statement of Gandhi is a document of much significance since it contains the basic grounds of his opposition to the so-called Democracies.

Gandhi told Louis Fischer when he visited him in June 1942 :

"I see no difference between the Fascist or Nazi powers and the Allies.* All are exploiters, all resort to ruthlessness to the extent required to compass their end. America and Britain are very great nations but their greatness will count as dust before the bar of dumb humanity, whether African or Asiatic. ...They have no right to talk of human liberty and all else unless they have washed their hands clean of the pollution. ...Then but not till then, will they be fighting for a new order."[129]

In a conversation held in 1940 (Mahadev Desai's report cited above, see pp. 360-1) he unequivocally stated : "The European Democracies are to my mind a negation of democracy."

Gandhi's indictment of western democracies was based on three fundamental counts : (a) exploitation of the weak 'by a few capitalist owners' ; (b) expansion of capitalism resulting in the exploitation of the weaker peoples ; (c) white racialism. According to Gandhi, any sort of exploitation is indistinguishable from violence. He could very well comprehend the fundamental contradictions of modern age. It was indeed his genius that

* "There is a fundamental difference between fascism and even this imperialism which I am fighting."—Gandhi's speech before the AICC meeting on August 7, 1942, Quoted in Tendulkar, *Mahatma*, The Publications Division, Govt. of India, 1962, vol. 6, p. 167.

One may allege inconsistency between these statements. But his overall judgement seems to be that there was no difference between imperialism and fascism as *systems*. If there was a difference, the difference was only in degree.

was needed to pierce the outer shells of western democracies and expose violence in its nakedness.

We use the word 'genius' advisedly because his was the lone voice of political prudence and maturity when confusion reigned supreme. While the pronouncedly progressive forces in and outside the country, the official Congress leadership not excluded, were busy rationalizing the distinction between the fascist or Axis powers and democratic or Allied powers, he was the only political leader who could expose the basic coercive character of capitalist democracy. It may not be irrelevant here to refer to the formulation made round about that time by the professedly most advanced and radical force of the world, viz. the Communist International. According to Manuilsky, one of the top leaders of the Communist Party of Soviet Union as well as of the Communist International :

"The growing menace of world imperialist war is causing all class, national and state forces to separate into two camps : the camp of war and the camp of peace. The centre of forces which are operating to bring about war, to accelerate its outbreak is FASCISM ; in Europe the most reactionary and aggressive form of Fascism exists in Hitlerite Germany. In Asia, it is in military-fascist Japan. ...Italy stands fully armed..."[130]

This logic led the official world Communist movement to brand fascism as the 'greater enemy' and imperialism as the 'lesser enemy' which culminated in a broad peace front composed of Communists and the 'democratic' imperialists. The history of transformation of 'peace front to people's war' and then to 'People's Age' is the history of unabashed betrayal of the fundamental interests of the colonial peoples and the working men of capitalist countries wearing the label of democracy. Incidentally, this appraisal of the world situation in characterizing imperialist powers as 'democratic' violates the fundamentals of international socialism as propounded by Marx, Engels and Lenin. The military-diplomatic alliance between the Soviet Union and the capitalist democracies of Britain, France and America was presented as the camp of peace. In the words of Stalin :

"It may now be considered indisputable that in the course of war imposed upon the United Nations by Hitlerite Germany a *radical* demarcation of forces and the formation of two opposite camps has taken place—the camp of the Italo-German coalition and the camp of the Anglo-Soviet-American coalition."[131] (emphasis added)

So there appeared to the world Communist movement and all the units owing allegiance to the Communist International a radical or qualitative change in the character of 'democratic' imperialism. Objective analysis of the *basic* character of imperialism-capitalism was tabooed ; independent judgement was declared a heresy. The fundamental characteristics of the imperialist democracies, allegedly turned 'prisoners in the people's camp', were ignored and the injunction was issued that in order to defeat fascism, criticism of 'democratic' powers was to be suspended, not to speak of organized action of the peoples against them. In such a situation, Gandhi, while remaining indifferent to the theoretical niceties of social dynamics, could, by his incisive political insight, easily get at the root of the problem. Therein lay the superiority of his political acumen. Unlike the 'progressives' who branded him a 'social reactionary' and 'an agent of the Indian capitalists', Gandhi was uninhibited in his outlook and thinking. That dogma-free attitude enabled him to look at world affairs in a clear perspective while the 'vanguards' sang to the tunes set by the bandmaster at 'the citadel of world revolution'.

Views on Institutional Basis of Democracy

The fundamental institution on which the parliamentary system of government is based is that of periodic elections. In fact, elections have become the linchpin on which the entire constitutional apparatus of parliamentary government hangs. The enormous importance given to elections tends to equate democracy with the majority rule. In effect, this so-called majority rule is only the rule of a minority. Under a system of franchise as we have in India or in Great Britain, it is possible for a government to command a majority in the

Parliament on the basis of minority votes. It is an unavoidable adjunct of the present system. Even taking for granted that a genuine majority rule, i.e., the rule of 51% of the electorate is established, can it be equated with genuine democracy? Gandhi's concept of democracy was not limited to formal adherence to the external mechanism of the parliamentary type of government. His approach was essentially moral. He did not believe in the priority of political mechanism to one's own conscience.

In 1920, he wrote: "...in matters of conscience the Law of Majority has no place."[132]

The next year he commented: "Let us not push the mandate theory to ridiculous extremes and become slaves to resolutions of majorities. That would be a revival of brute force in a more virulent form. If rights of minorities are to be respected, the majority must tolerate and respect their opinion and action... It will be the duty of the majority to see to it that minorities receive a proper training and are not otherwise exposed to insults. Swaraj will be an absurdity if individuals have to surrender their judgment to majority."[133]

Individual freedom, according to Gandhi, is the essence of democracy. In an article (*Young India*, 2. 3. 22) he opined: "The rule of majority has a narrow application, i.e., one should yield to the majority in matters of detail.* But it is slavery to be amenable to the majority no matter what its decisions are. ...Democracy is not a state in which people act like sheep. Under democracy, individual liberty of opinion and action is jealously guarded. I, therefore, believe that the minority has a perfect right to act differently from the majority..."[134]

Gandhi wanted a government not based on the coercion of even a minority but on the conversion of it.[135] In his opinion, the rule of majority, when it becomes coercive, is as intolerable as that of a bureaucratic minority.[136]

* In an article entitled 'The Law of Majorities', Gandhi wrote in *Young India* (15.7.20): "...I have found by experience that, if I wish to live in society and still retain my independence, I must limit the points of utter independence to matters of first rate importance. In all others which do not involve a departure from one's personal religion or moral code, one must yield to the majority."—*Young India*, 1919-22, op. cit., p. 208.

On September 28, 1944, in a press conference attended by Indian and foreign journalists, he explained his view of real democracy as follows :

"The way of approaching a question is not to examine the numerical strength of those behind the opinion, but to examine the soundness of opinion on merits, or else we will never reach a solution, and if we reach one, it will be a blind solution, simply because it is the wish of the largest body. If the largest body goes wrong, it is up to me to say you are wrong and not to submit."

"The rule of majority", he then added, "does not mean that it should suppress the opinion of even an individual, if it is sound. Opinion of an individual should have greater weight than the opinion of many, if that opinion is sound on merits. That is my view of real democracy."[137]

He had no very high regard for the quantitative principle of democracy. On the other hand, he attached the highest importance to quality irrespective almost of quantity.[138] As a believer in the first principle of moral rectitude of the individual, he asked "not to be cowed down by the thought of a small minority."[139] For to be in a minority is sometimes a privilege and he would rather love to be in the minority of one. Gandhi's life shows that he literally lived the life of 'a minority of one' and ploughed a lonely furrow for the vindication of the principle he thought to be true.

Hind Swaraj records that elections as the mechanism of determining the will of the people did not appeal to Gandhi. He moderated his views later. Voicing the demands of the Indian people for the inauguration of a democratic political system, he wrote in *Young India* (29. 1. 25, p. 40) that by Svarāj he meant "the government of India by the consent of the people as ascertained by the largest number of the adult population" (see p. 369 ; also p. 365n *supra*). A democrat in the true sense of the term, he wanted the elementary political right for the people.

In 1931, he declared : "I am wedded to adult suffrage... I cannot possibly bear the idea that a man who has got

wealth should have the vote but that a man who has got character but no wealth or literacy should have no vote, or that a man who works honestly by the sweat of his brow day in and day out should not have the vote for the crime of being a poor man."[140]

In 1940, he wrote : "If independence is born non-violently all the component parts will be voluntarily interdependent working in perfect harmony under a representative central authority which will derive its sanction from the confidence reposed in it by the component parts." The central power, he added, would be based on "universal suffrage exercised by a disciplined and politically intelligent electorate."[141]

Again in 1947 : "As to the franchise, he swore by the franchise of all adults, male and female, above the age of twenty-one or even eighteen. He would bar old men like himself. They were of no use as voters. ..Thus he would have a bar against persons beyond a certain age, say fifty, as he would against youngsters below eighteen."[142]

Along with adult franchise, or even before that, he would have universal education, not necessarily literary, except perhaps as an aid.[143]*

We have seen above that in *Hind Swaraj* Gandhi was not favourably disposed towards the party system. He maintained this point of view during the rest of his life. A question may be raised : Why did he then associate himself with the Indian National Congress ? It should be noted here that the Indian National Congress, in the pre-independence days, was not a political party in the sense a party is understood to function. A heterogeneous organization like the Congress was more of a broad political anti-imperialist platform rather than an agency of coming to power through normal constitutional channels. It was more of a movement than a party-political machine. As we have observed earlier, Gandhi did not struggle for power as an end in itself ; it was for him a means of

* "Literacy is not the end of education nor even the beginning. It is only one of the means whereby men and women can be educated."— Gandhi in *Harijan*, 31. 7. 37, p. 197.

rendering service to the people and of investing them with authority. A few days before the meeting of the All-India Congress Committee in November 1947, Gandhi mooted the idea that the political goal of the Congress having been achieved with the attainment of independence, the Congress ought to liquidate itself voluntarily.[144] Because of the changed character of the Congress, turned a party of the ruling capitalist class of India since independence, Gandhi could carry nobody with him in that direction. The day before he was assassinated, he outlined his ideas on the reconstitution of the Congress in a draft plan, which subsequently came to be known as his 'Last Will and Testament'.* The preamble of the draft ran: "Though split into two, India having attained political independence through means devised by the Indian National Congress, the Congress in its present shape and form, as a propaganda vehicle and a parliamentary machine, has outlived its use. India has still to attain social, moral and economic independence in terms of its seven hundred thousand villages as distinguished from its cities and towns. ...For these and similar reasons, the A.I.C.C. resolves to disband the existing Congress organization and flower into a Lok Sevak Sangh." The idea conveyed here suggests that he wanted power as a means of service, and not as an end in itself.

Since Gandhi had to operate within a given concrete historical situation, his corporate or political activities were directed towards—which ultimately paved the way for—the creation of of a national democratic state order. He was alive to this development. But so far as his theoretical concept was concerned he did not move from his original position. The following excerpt from a conversation with Louis Fischer will bear out this statement.

"I realize," Gandhi said, "that despite my views there will be a central government administration. However, I do not believe in the accepted Western form of democracy with its universal voting for parliamentary representatives."

* See Appendix II.

"What would you have India do ?" Fischer asked.

"There are seven hundred thousand villages in India. Each would be organized according to the will of its citizens, all of them voting. Then there would be seven hundred thousand votes and not four hundred million. Each village, in other words, would have one vote. The villages would elect their district administrations, and the district administrations would elect the provincial administrations, and these in turn would elect a president who would be the national chief executive."

"That is very much like the Soviet system," Fischer said.

"I did not know that," Gandhi admitted. "I don't mind."[145]

Pursuing the discussion further Gandhi reminded Fischer, "Parliamentary democracy is not immune to corruption."[146]

It may be pointed out here that at the Round Table Conference, Gandhi suggested indirect election through the Pañcāyats.[147]

Gandhi had his own concept of representative democracy* backed by a non-violent sanction. In an interview with Gandhi a few days before his death, Mr. Vincent Sheean asked : "If those who believe in the ideal of non-violence keep away from government, government will continue to be carried on by the use of force. How is then the transformation of the existing government to be brought about ?"

Gandhi admitted that ordinarily government was impossible without the use of force. "I have, therefore, said that a man who wants to be good and do good in all circumstances must not hold power."

"Is all government to come to a standstill then ?" Mr. Sheean asked.

"No," Gandhi rejoined. "The man of non-violence can send those to the government who represent his will. If he goes there himself he exposes himself to a corrupting influence

* Gandhi was opposed to bicameral legislature and to representation of special interests since they violate the fundamental principles of popular democracy.—See *The Nation's Voice*, eds., C. Rajagopalachar & J. C. Kumarappa, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1958, pp. 18-19.

of power. But my representative holds power of attorney only during my pleasure. If he falls prey to temptation, he can be recalled. I cannot recall myself. All this requires a high degree of intelligence on the part of electorate. There are about half a dozen constructive work organizations. I do not send them to the parliament. I want them to keep parliament in check by educating and guiding the voters."

"You mean to say that power always corrupts ?"

"Yes," said Gandhi emphatically.[148]

Gandhi wanted to evolve political system suited to the genius of the Indian people.[149] He told Fischer : "I do not think that a free India will function like the other countries of the world. We have our own forms to contribute.[150] And that form was Village Svarāj or Pañcāyat Rāj or in plain English, democracy from the below. "True democracy cannot be worked by twenty men sitting at the centre. It has to be worked from below by the people of every village."[151] Before outlining his concept of Village Svarāj let us proceed to consider the Gandhian concept of the foundations of democracy.

Foundations of Democracy

In a foregoing section on Svarāj, we have seen that he believed essentially in the "sovereignty of the people based on pure moral authority" (see p. 355 *supra*). Institutional framework of democracy does not guarantee power to the people. So, that is not enough. "Democracy is an impossible thing until the power is shared by all...Even a *pariah*, a labourer...will have his share in self-government."[152]

But how to achieve this democracy ? The essence of democracy lies in non-violence, Gandhi reminds us. In our earlier discussion on his criticism of Western democracies we have seen that his fundamental objection rested on the ground that these nominal democracies were founded on violence. We have also seen that Svarāj of the masses, according to Gandhi, is integrally related to a non-violent structure of society (see p. 368-9 *supra*). We need not, therefore, engage ourselves in a detailed discussion. But, for

the sake of systematization, we shall briefly refer to his views.

Gandhi held the view that "without the recognition of non-violence on a national scale there is no such thing as a constitutional or democratic government."[153] It was his conviction that "Science of non-violence alone can lead one to pure democracy."[154] He stated his belief in no uncertain terms : "True democracy or Swaraj of the masses can never come through untruthful and violent means, for the simple reason that the natural corollary to their use would be to remove all opposition through the suppression or extermination of the antagonists. That does not make for individual freedom. Individual freedom can have the fullest play only under a regime of of unadulterated *ahimsa*."[155] Addressing the historic August (1942) session of All-India Congress Committee, Gandhi reiterated his faith once again that violent means led to the concentration of power in the hands of a few and frustrated the ends of popular revolutions. "I read Carlyle's *French Revolution* while I was in prison, and Pandit Jawaharlal has told me something about the Russian revolution. But it is my conviction that inasmuch as these struggles were fought with the weapon of violence, they failed to realize the democratic ideal. In the democracy which I have envisaged, a democracy established by non-violence, there will be equal freedom for all. Everybody will be his own master."[156] And, "...true democracy can only be the outcome of non-violence. The structure of a world federation can be raised only on a foundation of non-violence, and violence will have to be totally abjured from world affairs."[157]

Gandhi said in the same speech : "Ours is not a drive for power." So far as Gandhi himself was concerned the statement was more than proven. But for others, namely the leadership of the Congress, it was a different case. He told Dr. Zakir Hussain in December 1947 : "Today everybody in the Congress is running after power. Let us not be in the same cry as the power-seekers...but keep altogether aloof from power politics and its contagion. The objective of the constructive work

organisations is *to generate* political power, *not to capture* it."[158] (emphases added)

This is a key point of Gandhian political philosophy. Gandhi had undoubtedly an ethical attitude towards politics, but to dismiss this essential point as moralistic would be to miss the essence of Gandhian theory. The plea for generating political power has deep-rooted sociological and political significance. This means that power is not to be imposed from above, it has to evolve upwards. And in the Gandhian scheme, dissemination of power is only possible on a non-violent basis.

Democracy was not merely a matter of power-form with him ; he laid much stress on the cultivation of democratic spirit. He stated in September 1934 : "I hold that democracy cannot be evolved by forcible methods. The spirit of democracy cannot be imposed from without. It has to come from within."[159]

The democracy of Gandhi's conception does not demand dead uniformity ; toleration is one of the essential basis of such a concept. He wrote in *Harijan* (31.5.42, p. 172) :

"Evolution of democracy is not possible if we are not prepared to hear the other side. We shut the doors of reason when we refuse to listen to our opponents, or having listened, make fun of them. If intolerance becomes a habit, we run the risk of missing the truth. Whilst, with the limits that Nature has put upon our understanding, we must act fearlessly according to the light vouchsafed to us, we must always keep an open mind and be ever ready to find that what we believed to be truth was, after all, untruth. This openness of mind strengthens the truth in us."

Democracy presupposes freedom of thought. Of the fundamental rights of the individual, the right to freedom of thought and expression, in an ultimate as well as in an instrumental sense, is amongst the most essential bases. Gandhi accepted this liberal (in its original sense) view of democracy and fostered real freedom of thought in all his activities. But that was not the distinctive note of Gandhi in the history of political theory and action. What marked him

off from other political theorists was his insistence on the means of arriving at Truth, that is to say, on the application of the *satyāgraha* method. Self-suffering, he used to say, is the law of man as violence is the law of the brute. Civilization, he held, consists in the substitution of intoleration and violence by methods of toleration and persuasion wherever conflicts occur in human relations (see pp. 293-4 *supra*). This attitude of toleration in human relations flows from his philosophical belief of Truth appearing in fragments. "The golden rule of conduct, therefore, is mutual toleration, seeing that we will never all think alike and we see *Truth* in fragment and from different angles of vision. Conscience is not the same thing for all. Whilst, therefore, it is a good guide for individual conduct, imposition of that conduct upon all will be an insufferable interference with everybody's freedom of conscience."[160] The method of persuasion and conversion, that is, the non-violent way, is the best way, so argued Gandhi, of attaining democracy.

Democracy to be genuine needs an appropriate mental climate of the citizens. Toleration of and respect for others' opinions help in the growth of such a climate. Gandhi pointed to that direction. As Prof. Nirmal Kumar Bose reminds us : "One of Gandhiji's greatest contributions to India has been this insistence upon the philosophical foundation of democracy."[161]

This philosophical approach holds the key to an understanding of his concept of state being a secular one.[162] In his opinion, "The State should undoubtedly be secular. Everyone living in it should be entitled to profess his religion without let or hindrance, so long as the citizen obeyed the common law of the land." "If I were a dictator", he said in 1946, "religion and State would be separate. I swear by my religion. I will die for it. But it is my personal affair. The State has nothing to do with it ...That is everybody's personal concern." He did not believe in State religion even though the whole community had only one religion. He was opposed to State aid, partly or wholly, to religious bodies. This does not mean, Gandhi explained, that the State schools would not give ethical

teaching. In his opinion, teaching of fundamental ethics is common to all religions. But the State cannot concern itself or cope with religous instructions. It is superfluous to add that by religion he meant denominational religion and not fundamental ethics which, in his opinion, "is common to all religions".

Secularism as a concept is integrally related to democracy. Gandhi underlined the kernel of democracy by stressing on this aspect. This apparently bears little significance. But a close examination will lead to a different conclusion. First, because of the obvious historic limitations imposed on India, the pattern of the development of modern Indian history did not resemble the classical democratic type ; secondly, as a corollary to the same, the forces of obscurantism, social orthodoxy and communal reaction were firmly rooted in the body politic. They had social bases to stand upon. Sociologically speaking, the pre-capitalist values (in the classical sense) held sway over a large mass of the Indian people. Gandhi preached secularism at a period when the forces of social reaction tried to thwart the course of national development on a democratic basis. His emphasis on the secular character of the state reflected the opinion of the advanced section of the nation. His advocacy of the idea helped in accelerating the pace of national democratic development. Therein lies its significance.

Decentralization

Gandhi declared : "The end to be sought is human happiness combined with full mental and moral growth. I use the adjective moral as synonymous with spiritual. This end can be achieved under decentralization. Centralization as a system is inconsistent with a non-violent structure of society."[163] Gandhi's opposition to centralization was based on a fundamental ground. He held : "Centralization cannot be sustained and defended without adequate force."[164] We have seen above that his programme was not power-oriented ; it was not, in his words, a 'drive for power', for it was his conviction that a 'skirmish for power' is 'ungainly' in the ultimate sense of investing the people with authority to shape their own destiny.

Centralization leads to the concentration of power in the hands of a few and that, in its turn, robs the people of its supreme authority in the matter of determination of public issues. Not only that, in an over-centralized state man loses his human dignity and becomes a cog in the wheel of the vast and impersonal state machine. Man becomes de-personalized. His programme of 'generation of power', he hoped, would avoid the incongruity of people's power with centralized state power. That is why he laid much stress on Constructive Programme, *the modus operandi* of non-violent revolution. For him, democracy was "the art and science of mobilizing the entire physical, economic and spiritual resources of all the various sections of the people in the service of the common good of all."[165] In order to mobilize the total resources of the nation a sense of belongingness on the part of the people must be imparted and institutionally organized. Decentralization of power—economic and political—seemed to Gandhi to be the antidote to the alienation, a concomitant of factory civilization and vast state complex, suffers from. He wanted to give a new direction to politics and for that he went to the roots. He believed that power to be effective and genuine from the standpoint of the masses, must lie with the people which could only be possible in small communities of villages. "Society based on non-violence can only consist of groups settled in villages in which voluntary co-operation is the condition of dignified and peaceful existence."[166] Hence he cried for Village Svarāj, Pañcāyatī Rāj, or democracy from below.

The term 'Pañchāyat Rāj' needs to be clarified since the employment of this and allied indigenous terms have been misunderstood in certain circles. A hasty and cursory glance at some of Gandhi's writings might suggest political reaction. As has been noted by a keen student of Gandhian political theory, his nostalgic recollections of India's past, coupled with his comments urging the rejection of aspects of modern technology, have led some observers to label Gandhi a traditionalist and a reactionary. But, she continues, "we find again and again Gandhi's use of the traditional to communicate new ideas,

his use of phrases emerging out of established ways and familiar institutions to transmit newly created values."[167]

What was the picture of rural democracy that Gandhi envisaged ?

"My idea of Village Swaraj is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbours for its own vital wants and yet interdependent for many others in which dependence is a necessity. ...The government of the village will be conducted by tho Panchayat of five persons annually elected by the adult villagers, male and female, possessing minimum prescribed qualifications. These will have all the authority and jurisdiction required. Since there will be no system of punishments in the accepted sense, this Panchayat will be the legislature, judiciary and executive combined to operate for its year of office. Any village can become such a republic today without much interference, even from the present Government whose sole effective connection with the villages is the exaction of village revenue. I have not examined here the question of the relations with the neighbouring villages and the centre if any. My purpose is to present an outline of village government. Here there is perfect democracy based upon individual freedom. The individual is the architect of his own government. The law of non-violence rules him and his government. He and his village are able to defy the might of the world. For the law governing every villager is that he will suffer death in the defence of his and his village's honour."[168]

Conveying the same idea again four years later in *Harijan*, he wrote :

"In this structure composed of innumerable villages, there will be ever-widening, never ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of the villages, till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units."[169]

The plea for village Svarāj and Pañcāyat Rāj, because of its traditional association with the past, might suggest a call for going back to the olden days. But did Gandhi advocate the literal revival of ancient village pañcāyāts ? In his romantic reaction, in *Hind Swaraj*, against the modern civilization he held that in olden days the Indians enjoyed true Home Rule.[170] One may conclude from a perfunctory reading of that book that he wanted to go back to that phase of history. Gandhi himself said in 1939 that his was not an attempt to go back to the ignorant, dark ages.[171] Now let us see for ourselves whether he wanted a literal revival of the ancient Indian village republics. To start with, it seems doubtful that Gandhi had any systematic notion of the political and sociological implications of the traditional village pañcāyat.[172] The historical record, incomplete as it is, shows a range of variations in the manner of selection and operation of this institution. However, a few predominant elements stand out as characteristics of the ancient pañcāyat system. The village pañcāyat was traditionally organized with the group, and not with the individual, as the unit. It was in many respects an extension of the Indian family system, and was strictly patriarchal in character.[173] But Gandhi's concern, as we have seen above, was consistently for the individual. How, then, could he reconcile this position with that of the revival of the ancient pañcāyat ? The answer is, we agree with Dr. Bondurant,[174] that he did not. For the pañcāyat of his conception was very different from that typical of the ancient system. He drew upon his experience and knowledge of the institutions of Indian society for terms to express the concepts and objectives which emerged from his own 'experiments with truth'. The ancient pañcāyat was a patriarchal 'assemblage of co-proprietors', if Maine's account is to be taken into account, while Gandhi's village democracy 'will be based on individual freedom' with the annual election by all the adult villagers—male and female alike—as an instrumental right of the villagers. The contrast between the two is too glaring to need further elaboration.